

# **The Gist of the Bible**

## **Book-by-Book**

***An Analysis of  
Each Book of the Bible***

**Alvin E. Bell, D.D.**



The Gist of the Bible  
BOOK by BOOK



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by  
**ALVIN E. BELL, D.D.**

ZONDERVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE  
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

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To

"THE ELECT LADY"

who, for more than fifty years, has exemplified  
in the author's home and parish all that

A PASTOR'S WIFE

should be,

this book is affectionately and gratefully

DEDICATED

This new paperback edition re-  
printed for popular use, 1961



## INTRODUCTION—THE BOOK OF BOOKS

The word "Bible" means "book." But the Bible is more than a book. It is a library of sixty-six books, some historical, others poetical, prophetic or doctrinal.

This library was written by at least forty different authors during a period of some fifteen centuries. These writers were of all the varied classes of society from fishermen and shepherds to kings.

And yet, despite the difference of their interests and qualifications and the changing ideals of the passing centuries, the product of their writing is not a case of "many men of many minds," but of many men and one mind, and that mind is the mind of the eternal Spirit of God under Whose guidance they all wrote.

The key-note of this entire library is in John 3:16, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Cut the scriptures anywhere and they bleed with the blood of the Lamb of God.

The relation of the Old Testament and New Testament has been well stated in the couplet:

"The New is in the Old concealed,  
The Old is in the New revealed;  
The New is in the Old contained,  
The Old is in the New explained."

## viii INTRODUCTION—THE BOOK OF BOOKS

Of the literary influence of the Bible Coleridge says, "To give the history of the Bible as a book would be little else than to relate the origin or first excitement of all the literature we possess. From this storehouse of literary materials our leading writers have most freely drawn."

Similarly, the world's greatest statesmen gladly credit the Bible with giving them whatever they had of power with men. William E. Gladstone called the Bible "God's best and richest gift to mankind." Daniel Webster said, "If there is aught of eloquence in me it is because I learned the scriptures at my mother's knee." And Lincoln writes, "I am profitably engaged in reading the Bible. Take all of this book on reason that you can and the rest on faith and you will live and die a better man."

But the chief power and influence of the Bible are spiritual, for Jesus says, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life."

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The Chapters from  
Genesis to Nehemiah 3

should catch you  
up with the others :-

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## GENESIS—THE BOOK OF BEGINNINGS

The word "Genesis" means "beginning," and the book of Genesis is a book of beginnings. Nothing is completed in Genesis. But here we have the beginning of everything except God, who is eternal.

Genesis records the beginning of heaven and earth; of all life—plant, animal and human; of marriage and the family; of society and nations; of sin and crime; of sorrow and death; of sacrifice and salvation.

Bible students have summed up the message of Genesis in three great words, namely: Generation, Degeneration, Regeneration. In these words we have the beginning of the three worlds of nature, sin and grace. They tell us what God did, chapters 1 and 2; what Satan did, chapters 3 to 11, and what the God-man, Christ Jesus, would do, chapters 12 to 50.

Genesis was not written primarily to teach science, but to explain man's need of a Saviour because of his sin, and God's plan of salvation through a Saviour to be born of the Jews.

Instead of contradicting true science, Genesis goes beyond the furthest reaches of science, and bridges the three great gaps which science and evolution cannot bridge, viz., the origin of matter, the origin of animal life and the origin of man. The significant

words "God created" stand at each of these three bridges in Genesis 1:1, 21 and 27, at the very places where the evolutionist is put to confusion in his search for a "missing link."

Men would quarrel less to-day over the Book of Genesis if they would bear in mind that about ninety-nine per cent of the purpose of the book is to reveal the "Who" of Creation and one per cent to tell the "How" of Creation.

A parable of the havoc wrought by the entrance of sin into the world may be seen by placing together the first five and the last four words of this book: "In the beginning God created—a coffin in Egypt."

God's plan to make that coffin a symbol of faith and hope through the Saviour who is the seed of the woman, and for whom the way is prepared in a chosen race descended from Abraham, and to spread the blessings of this faith and hope to all nations, is the story of Genesis.



## EXODUS—THE WAY OUT

The message of Exodus is evident in its name. It relates the "Going Out" of a nation of slaves from the land of Egypt, where they and their ancestors had been in bondage for more than four centuries.

As Genesis ended with the picture of Joseph's coffin in Egypt, Exodus relates the national history incident to carrying that coffin back to the land of Joseph's fathers.

Exodus differs from Genesis in that its message concerns a nation rather than outstanding individuals.

Its message may be summed up in three great words from our own national history, namely, "Slavery—Emancipation—Reconstruction"; or, speaking in terms of geography, the three words are "Egypt—Red Sea—Sinai," and these suggest three other terms, "The Ten Plagues—the Passover—the Ten Commandments."

The great character of Exodus is Moses. The book relates the history of Israel during the forty years of his preparation in the palace of Pharaoh and the forty years of further preparation as a shepherd in the very wilderness in which his forty years of active national service should be spent in reconstructing a horde of slaves into a nation.

This nation's Ruler was to be Jehovah; its con-

stitution was the Law given on Mount Sinai; its central national shrine was the Tabernacle; its bond of unity was the spiritual worship of the one true God and its national hope was the "Prophet like unto Moses"—whose blood would be shed for the spiritual emancipation of the nation, as was that of the passover lamb, and whose bones, like that lamb's, should not be broken, who would come down from heaven to be the world's Bread of Life as the manna was the heaven-sent sustenance of Israel during its forty years of wandering in the wilderness of Sin.

Christ is the true Law-giver and Mediator of whom Moses was but a type. The emancipation recorded in Exodus is but a parable of His emancipation of all of us.

## LEVITICUS—THE PRIEST'S HAND-BOOK

Every minister who believes in an orderly service for such official acts as baptisms, marriages, burials, and the like, has a little book containing orders of service for such occasions.

The Book of Leviticus served this purpose for the priests and Levites of the Old Testament Church.

Its theme is "holiness," a term occurring oftener in this book than in any other book of the Bible. Its great problems are sin and redemption.

Its key-note is in 19:2, "Ye shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy."

Burnt offerings, meal offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings and trespass offerings all had their place in the worship God prescribed as a means of putting away sin.

The elaborate ritual prescribed in Leviticus reached its height in the impressive ceremonies of the great annual Day of Atonement when the high priest passed through the veil of the temple into the holy of holies to present to God the blood of sacrifice.

The best commentary on Leviticus ever written is the Epistle to the Hebrews, which explains its elaborate system of sacrifices and offerings in brief by saying, "Without shedding of blood is no remission."

From Hebrews we learn that these sacrifices and

feasts, and even the very priesthood of Leviticus were but "a shadow of good things to come" and "a figure for the time then present."

Without Christ, our great High Priest, and the shedding of His own blood on the real Day of Atonement, Leviticus is meaningless.

When He died on the cross the Levitical sacrifices were fulfilled and put away forever. The veil of the temple was to be entered no more with the blood of beasts, and so, as St. John tells us, it was "rent in twain from the top to the bottom."

Clothed with His righteousness the holiness demanded in Leviticus is put within the reach of all of us.

## NUMBERS—THE BOOK OF WANDERING

The Book of Numbers receives its name from two numberings of the children of Israel recorded in this book. The first census was taken at the beginning and the second at the close of the thirty-eight years covered by the book.

This book reveals God's love of order. Israel was not to be a mob but an orderly host. Each tribe and family and household had its allotted position and every man had his work assigned him in camp or on the march. The center of all this order was the tabernacle with its overshadowing cloud by day and fire by night.

Numbers might as properly be named "The Book of Murmurings." They murmured against their food and drink, their blessings and punishments, their leaders and priests, and even against God.

Their great failure came at Kadesh-Barnea when the twelve spies reported their findings after searching out the promised land. The majority report was one of pessimism. The difficulties were too great. They felt like grasshoppers in comparison with the natives.

But Caleb and Joshua dared to render a minority report. They saw all of the difficulties reported by the majority, but they did not overlook God as the others had done.

The people followed the path of least resistance and refused to enter the land to whose borders Jehovah had led them.

The result was thirty-eight years of wandering and discipline in the wilderness until the entire adult generation except Caleb and Joshua had died.

The book teaches both the goodness and severity of God, severity in the punishment of sin, even the sin of Moses; goodness as shown in the daily manna, the guiding cloud, the water from the rock, the brazen serpent for healing, all of which were but types of Christ. "For as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

## DEUTERONOMY—THE BOOK OF INSTRUCTION

The word “Deuteronomy” means “second law,” and the Book of Deuteronomy is so named because it contains a repetition of God’s Law to the Israelites—not only the moral law expressed in the Ten Commandments, but also the civil law and the ceremonial law.

It is a series of six farewell addresses of Moses, delivered within a period of forty days immediately prior to the death of this great patriarch and law-giver.

Its characteristic word is “remember,” with which Moses summons memory to minister to conduct and bring the influence of retrospection upon their prospect.

The first of these farewell addresses (chapters 1 to 4) recounts the forty years of wandering, and warns against idolatry as their chief danger. God’s providence is recounted to inspire obedience.

The second and longest address (chapters 5 to 28) explains the nature of the obedience demanded in the first address and pronounces the blessings of obedience and the curse of disobedience.

The third address (chapters 29 to 38) recites the covenant in which God plights His troth with Israel and even promises mercy and restoration when Israel shall repent of her violations of this troth.

The fourth address (chapter 31) was delivered in celebration of Moses' one hundred twentieth birthday, in connection with which Joshua was prepared to succeed Moses and the Law was rewritten for preservation in the ark and by the Levites.

Moses understood the psychology of religious and patriotic song. Folks who forget sermons will remember songs. So he sings a farewell song (chapter 32) into the souls of the people, forcing them to remember their own unfaithfulness to a faithful God.

The sixth address (chapter 33) is one of blessing for the tribes, and the book closes with the solemn scene of Moses ascending the mount to view the promised land and die in the hands of God.

The value of Deuteronomy to us is indicated by Christ's three quotations from it by which He routed Satan in the wilderness temptation.

With Deuteronomy "all's love, yet all's law." This love and this law both meet and are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, of whom this book speaks so clearly as "the prophet like unto Moses" whom God would raise up from the midst of this people.



## JOSHUA—THE BOOK OF POSSESSION

The Book of Joshua receives its name from its leading character, around whom all of its history centers.

It falls into three divisions: (1) Conquering the Land, Chapters 1 to 12; (2) Dividing the Land, Chapters 13 to 22; (3) Joshua's Farewell Addresses, Chapters 23 and 24.

No national crisis ever arises but God is found ready with a leader thoroughly prepared. As Moses was prepared to lead the people out of Egypt, Joshua was prepared to lead them into Canaan.

This book is a book of war. It is a fearful story of the extermination of nations whose sins had become a stench. Israel was God's instrument for the punishment of the Canaanites, just as later the Assyrian and Roman were his tools in punishing the Jews for their apostasy.

In fierce and bloody conflict marked by the finest military strategy, thirty-one kings and their tribes are defeated, but always in such a way as to remind the Israelites that their victories were won not by their might or power, but by the Captain of the Lord's hosts, who fought with them.

After the conquest of the land was completed the land was divided by lot among the tribes and their settled life began.

Early in the book occurs an incident which lends color to much of the history of the twenty-five years it recounts. Rahab, the harlot, and her family were saved from the destruction of Jericho by a scarlet line which hung from her window. That crimson cord stands for the grace of God and salvation by faith, and it runs through all the history of the book, and in fact through all the Bible.

The book closes with the farewell addresses of Joshua to the people, in which he recounted God's hand in their history and challenged them to choose as their God, the God who had chosen them as His people.

“Choose you this day whom ye will serve: But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

This is the great need of the world today—religion in the home, the restoration of the family altar of our fathers, homes wherein honor is given to the Lord Jesus Christ, who appeared to Joshua as “Captain of the host of the Lord.”

An ounce of religion in the home is worth a pound of religion in the Church.

## JUDGES—THE BOOK OF DECLENSION

The Book of Judges receives its name from the thirteen judges or dictators whose deeds it records in the period of something over three hundred years between the death of Joshua and the establishment of the monarchy under the first king.

The most important of these Judges were Othniel, Ehud, Deborah and Barak, Gideon, Jephtha and Samson.

The outline of the book shows (1) an historical introduction connecting its history with that of Joshua, 1:1 to 3:6; (2) the history of the Judges, 3:7 to 16:31; and (3) an appendix which reveals the awful spiritual and moral declension of the times, Chapters 17 to 21.

The gist of the book may be gotten by combining three of its oft recurring phrases: (1) "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord"; (2) "And the Lord sold them into the hands of their enemies round about"; (3) "And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer who delivered them."

In the most sickening fashion imaginable, these three phrases representing Sin, Punishment and Deliverance, follow one another through seven sad cycles of history.

God's people never profited from their former

sad experiences. The burned child persisted in rushing again and again into the same destroying fire of idolatry.

The inception of all this persistent declension to the heathen worship all about the Israelites is found in their disobedience to God's command through Joshua. For instead of "utterly exterminating" these corrupt people, we read of all the tribes of Israel the same sad neglect, "neither did they drive out the inhabitants but the Canaanites dwelt among them and became tributaries."

It was the old story of "marrying a drunkard to reform him." Instead of Israel lifting up the Canaanite they degenerated to the level of the worship of lust practiced by the heathen.

The book has two outstanding lessons for us. The first is that "the wages of sin is death," and the only safety is in absolute separation. The second is that of the unfailing mercy and ready forgiveness of God when the sinner repents and cries to God.

In the Revised Version the word used for these Judges or deliverers is "saviour," so they all become a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, our true Deliverer and Saviour from sin and the punishment we all deserve.

## RUTH—THE BOOK OF RESTORATION

The beautiful character who is the heroine of the Book of Ruth has not only named this book, but countless thousands of sweet girl babies through the ages.

This is one of the choicest idyls of all literature; a love story that has fascinated millions and lost none of its charm through the centuries.

This story is a classic among the stories of lovers because it contains the elements of profound sorrow turned into great joy; of love overcoming prejudice; of noble self-sacrifice richly rewarded in both hero and heroine; of true love sanctified by religion; of marriage and a life happy ever afterwards; and just as the story closes we catch a glimpse of a baby's crib, and hear the sweet music of a babe's cooing, in whose veins is running the blood of Israel's greatest king and of David's greater Son, the Saviour of both Jew and Moabite.

The widowed Naomi and Ruth and the noble Boaz stand out in sharp contrast against the black background of the days of the Judges, those bloody, immoral, idolatrous days, in which these noble souls lived in faith and faithfulness to God, and in love and purity before an evil generation. So the story is a blow at pessimism, for even at its worst the world is not all bad. God always has His "thou-

sands who have not bowed the knee to Baal." He has never been left without witnesses even though these be but as "a remnant."

For the expression of loyalty and devotion no human words have ever excelled these words of Ruth, the Moabitess, to Naomi: "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

This is supreme devotion, love to the uttermost. But its secret is kinship in the things of the soul—"Thy God shall be my God." There can be no true love without this kinship of soul.

The purpose of the book is evident in its closing note about Obed, the child born to Boaz and Ruth, from whom sprang Jesse, the father of David. Thus the gentile Ruth becomes one of the forbears, as to the flesh, of the Lord Jesus Christ, who obliterates all race and class distinctions.

How strange that among the four women mentioned in the genealogy of Christ in the first chapter of Matthew are included Rahab, the harlot; Bathsheba, the adulteress, and Ruth, the gentile.

Truly He is the Saviour of all. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

## FIRST SAMUEL—THREE BIOGRAPHIES

First Samuel is a book of transition. It marks the transition of the theocracy established under Moses to the monarchy begun in Saul. It also marks the transition of national influence from the priest to the prophet.

The book divides itself into the biographies of three men—Samuel, Saul and David.

Samuel is second only to Moses among all Old Testament characters. He is the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. He is a tribute to the maternal influence of his godly mother, Hannah, in answer to whose prayers he was given.

The great grief of his life was that when he was old, Israel demanded of him, "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations," whereas, God wanted Israel to be a "peculiar people," unlike other nations. God comforted him in the matter by assuring him that Israel had rejected God rather than Samuel.

Saul is the most disappointing character of the Old Testament. Never did a young man enter upon his life work with brighter prospects. And never did a youth so thoroughly prostitute his advantages.

He was unappreciative of the wise counselor he had in Samuel, unworthy of the noble son he had in Jonathan, untrue to the friend he had in David and



unfaithful to the trust of kingship with which God honored him. His suicide in the battle of Gilboah is one of the tragedies of scripture.

David was God's choice for king rather than Saul. He was a man after God's own heart, the noblest of all the kings of Israel.

He was necessarily a man of war. But all his campaigns for the settlement of his kingdom were waged in the spirit in which as a youth he went forth to meet and slay the Philistine giant: "I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel."

The friendship of David and Jonathan is one of the brightest spots of the book, as the insane jealousy of Saul for David is the darkest. By that jealousy and the persecution and exile growing out of it David was developed into one of God's noblemen.

This book with its story of the failure of earthly prophets, priests and kings, would be intolerably sad, were it not for the assurance that all these were but harbingers and forerunners preparing the way for the coming, in the fullness of time, of Israel's ideal Prophet, Priest and King in the person of the Son of David, our Lord Jesus Christ.



## THE SECOND BOOK OF SAMUEL—THE RISE AND FALL OF DAVID

The Second Book of Samuel might appropriately be named "The Acts of King David." The first ten chapters tell of his glory, the last fourteen tell as faithfully of his shame. The Bible "white-washes" no one, not even Israel's greatest king.

The forty years of David's reign chronicled in this book are the golden age of Jewish history. One of the king's first official acts was to conquer Jerusalem and make it not only the civil but also the religious center of his great realm, bringing into it the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant.

David would have gone further and built the temple had not God forbidden him to do so, and when forbidden to carry out this fond wish he was big and generous enough to be a mere gatherer of materials and to allow another to have the glory withheld from him, herein teaching us all a much needed lesson.

Great and glorious as David was as general, as king and as the sweet psalmist of Israel, he fell into the grossest and vilest of sins.

His sin of adultery with Bathsheba and his indirect murder of Uriah, her husband, represent the shame which, but for the grace of God, would have totally eclipsed his glory.

But no sinner was ever more genuinely repentant than David, or more ready to confess and admit the justice of the divine chastisements which fell upon him. Herein, again, he helps us all in such songs for the penitent as he gives us in Psalms 32 and 51.

Though repentant and forgiven, David nevertheless suffered the consequences of his sin in the kindred sins of his own children, which broke their father's heart.

Surely, in his case, "the chickens came home to roost." The one who thinks that he can mock God and "sow wild oats" and not suffer in the time of reaping needs to read this Second Book of Samuel.

That such a sinner as David could, by genuine repentance, become "a man after God's own heart" is an encouragement to all of us.

But the grace by which he was forgiven is still open to all in the more glorious kingdom of Christ, the Son of David and the Lord of David.

## THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS—A STORY OF SECESSION

The First Book of Kings covers the period of about one hundred and fifty years from the death of David to the death of Ahab, a period of shameful degeneration.

Solomon began well in seeking wisdom from God and in building for God a temple unsurpassed for magnificence in all the architecture of the ages.

“Solomon in all his glory” is a phrase which represents the climax in material splendor of all earthly monarchs. But this splendor was bought at the expense of “a grievous yoke” upon the necks of his people, against which they rebelled upon the accession of his foolish son Rehoboam, and the result was the secession of more than half of his kingdom in the north, and thereafter two kingdoms instead of one.

In the northern kingdom, Jeroboam, by the institution of calf worship, set the standard of wickedness and idolatry for a long train of wicked kings who are described as “doing evil in the sight of the Lord, walking in the way of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin.”

No wonder God set such kings aside and made the prophets the channel of his revelation and government instead of the kings.

The great man of this period is Elijah the prophet, whom God raised up to check Ahab, the worst of all Israel's kings.

The curse of these times was the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth, which was no more than adultery and the grossest immorality dignified by the cloak of religion, as is the case with much of the heathen religion of the world today.

The mistake of the evil kings of both northern and southern kingdoms was their failure to realize that every king as a ruler, is a subject of God, and all earthly government is under God, as our own immortal Lincoln has limited even our democracy as "under God—government of the people, by the people and for the people."

Be it in a monarchy or a democracy, the ruler who overlooks that phrase "under God" is a menace to good government.

The kings and kingdoms of this world must be subject to the King of kings and "crown Him Lord of all."

## THE SECOND BOOK OF KINGS—A STORY OF CORRUPTION AND CAPTIVITY

The Second Book of Kings is the saddest of all books of Jewish history, for this is the book which records the carrying away into captivity of Israel by Assyria in 721 B. C. and the captivity of Judah by Babylon in 586 B. C.

Of the twenty-seven kings of Judah and Israel who reigned during the three centuries covered by this book only six tried to serve Jehovah and lead the people in ways of righteousness, but even their reformations were shortlived, and the destruction of both kingdoms by the captivities became God's only alternative.

The people's sin of idolatry and persistent rebellion against God are aggravated by the fact that in these three centuries nearly all of the great prophets of the Jews lived and preached and pleaded and prayed for Israel and Judah. For this was the "Elizabethan Era" of Jewish literature which gave to all ages the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.

But the attitude of God's people toward the ministry and message of all these prophets is expressed in the complaint of Isaiah, "Who hath believed our report?"

Thus men failed God in His plan to make Abraham's seed a blessing to all nations. But though men fail, God cannot fail. His purposes must prevail, if not in mercy, then in wrath. And so the period of the captivity came with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

This was the fire which forever purged Israel from idol worship. Whatever other sins Israel had after their return from the seventy years of captivity in Babylon, idolatry was forever put away. They learned well the lesson God sought to teach them when He made them again the slaves of an idol-worshipping nation.

The ten tribes of Israel never returned from their captivity, but of Judah a remnant of faithful souls did return to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple and to carry forward the divine plan and preparations for the coming and the enthronement of Israel's true King and Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, who fulfills every ideal of kingship so miserably lacking in even the best of Israel's kings.

## THE FIRST AND SECOND BOOKS OF CHRONICLES—THE TEMPLE HISTORY

First and Second Chronicles are not a mere repetition of the history recorded in First and Second Kings, but the portion of that history which relates to the temple and its services. Everything is seen through the eyes of the priest rather than through those of the politician.

The chronicler is interested only in the history of Judah, and refers to the history of the northern kingdom of Israel only where it serves his purpose of throwing light on Judah and Jerusalem and the temple. He is also quite partial to the reigns of the good kings who reformed the religious life of the people and restored the services of the temple.

He relates with fulness the reigns of David and Solomon. David's because of his desire to build the temple and his preparation for it; Solomon's, because of his accomplishment of building the temple, to which he devotes six chapters, while only three are devoted to all the other affairs of that glorious reign. He has time and room in his record for anything that concerns the priests or the temple services.

Despite his manifest preference to confine his pen to the record of the reformers who cleansed the temple, restored the law, or put away idolatry, the



chronicler is faithful in recording the wickedness of the kings who led the people away from God's temple until by their wickedness they made it necessary for God to destroy the temple which the people had come to despise, and lead them away into the Babylonian captivity until their hearts should yearn again for the temple and its God.

The books close with the proclamation of Cyrus, King of Persia, permitting the captives to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

So from beginning to end of First and Second Chronicles the writer never gets out of sight of the towers and pinnacles of the temple. It could be said of him as it was said of Christ when later He cleansed the temple, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."

To him all "history" is "His-story"—God's story of His blessing upon those who seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and the failure of those who despise this law which Christ makes fundamental to all true success and happiness.



## EZRA—THE FIRST AND SECOND RETURNS FROM CAPTIVITY

Jeremiah prophesied the seventy years' captivity and the captives' return from Babylon. He did this by his parable of the vessel marred in the potter's hand, and related how "he made it again another vessel."

The Book of Ezra shows the divine Potter remaking the Babylonian captives into a nation, giving them the gospel of the second chance to carry out His divine purposes.

The book falls into two parts around its two great men.

The first six chapters deal with the first return from captivity under Zerubbabel, and of his work of rebuilding the altar and temple of Jehovah. The last four chapters tell of a second group's return under Ezra, and of his prosecution of the work begun under Zerubbabel.

Between chapters six and seven there is a silent period of about sixty years.

"The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, King of Persia," so the book begins, to make a proclamation, authorizing the return to Jerusalem of such captive Jews as desired to rebuild the house of Jehovah, and a remnant numbering about fifty thousand, of whom nearly one tenth were priests, returned under Zerubbabel.

Their first care upon returning to the ruined city was to restore the altar and all the offerings and feasts which they had so shamefully neglected before the captivity.

The foundations of the temple were laid amidst weeping of the older generation who had seen the greater splendor of Solomon's temple, and the joyous shouting of the younger generation.

The second contingent of captives returned under the leadership of Ezra, the scribe, about eighty years after the return under Zerubbabel.

Ezra stands out as a great man of faith, so sure of the protecting hand of God over that caravan of people and treasure, that he was ashamed to ask the king for a military guard after professing faith in the protecting hand of God.

The conditions Ezra found in Jerusalem among the Jews who had returned earlier were distressing and disgusting and demanded the drastic measures Ezra took to abate the evil of mixed marriages with their idolatrous neighbors.

Thus Israel was restored, as the potter remakes the marred vessel. So there is hope for every soul marred by sin. We may become "new creatures in Jesus Christ," who says to all of us, "Ye must be born again."

## NEHEMIAH—THE THIRD RETURN FROM CAPTIVITY

Nehemiah, whose autobiography we have in this book, is one of the most admirable characters of the Old Testament, and one of the noblest patriots in Jewish history.

His heart was broken by the reports that came back to Babylon from Jerusalem, telling of the desolation of the city of his fathers, its incompleated walls, its neglected temple and temple services and the afflictions of the remnant of Jews who had returned under Zerubbabel and Ezra.

His grief won from King Artaxerxes the permission to lead back to Jerusalem a third group of captives about fourteen years after the return under Ezra, and ninety-four years after the first return under Zerubbabel.

So thoroughly did Nehemiah imbue his countrymen with his patriotic zeal and faith and prayerfulness that in the remarkably short space of fifty-two days the colossal task of building the walls and gates of Jerusalem was completed. He knew how to secure co-operation, for, inspired by him, "the people had a mind to work."

Of course he met with tremendous opposition from their enemies in Samaria, but the work was pushed to completion with trowel in one hand and sword in the other.

Nehemiah had not only to fight the ridicule and treachery of Samaria, but also the heartlessness of the "loan sharks" of his own people, who were enslaving their brethren by usury. He rebuked them severely, shamed their greed by his own unselfish service and stopped their practices.

But Nehemiah's restorations went beyond the material things of walls and gates and rates of interest. He restored the Word of God to the people in a true revival in which he had the co-operation of Ezra. The law of Moses was read and explained to the whole populace and the people led to confess their sin and to enter into a covenant pledging loyalty to Jehovah.

Repeatedly in the book we see the sense of right relation between faith and works expressed thus, "We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night." Nehemiah would have said with Cromwell, "Trust in God and keep your powder dry." Before God he was justified by his faith alone; before men he proved his faith by his works.

## ESTHER—THE UNFAILING PROVIDENCE OF GOD

The Book of Esther is one of the most dramatic and fascinating of the entire divine library.

The scene is the court of Xerxes, king of Persia, during the eighty years' interval between the return of the Jewish captives under Zerubbabel and the return of those led back to Jerusalem by Ezra.

The book is sometimes criticized because it nowhere mentions the name of God. But no book of the Bible teaches the providence of God more forcibly than does Esther.

The low estate of morals at the Persian court is revealed in the incidents against which the finer womanly sensibilities of Vashti rebelled, bringing about her removal from the throne.

About four years later, Esther, a beautiful Jewish orphan girl, was selected to be queen. She had been reared by Mordecai, a cousin much older than herself, who was keeper of the king's gate.

The plot centers about Haman, the grand vizier of the court, who hates Mordecai for refusing, as a Jew, to bow down to him, and in vengeance plots the massacre of all Jews of the realm upon a given day.

Mordecai prevails upon Queen Esther, at the risk of her life, to break the precedents of the court by going into the king's presence unsummoned, to intercede for the life of her people.

She rises to the challenge in the noblest self-abandonment, with the words, "So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the laws; and if I perish, I perish."

The lesson of the book is that God's providence is over all things and that nothing "just happens," even in the court of a heathen king. "All things work together for good, to them that love God."

Haman's plot for the massacre of a race, his erection of a scaffold for the execution of Mordecai, his "power behind the throne" of a godless king, represent what James Russell Lowell must have had in mind when he wrote the lines:

"Truth forever on the scaffold,  
Wrong forever on the throne."

But the thwarting of Haman's plot, the exaltation of Mordecai, the execution of Haman, and the salvation of the Jews, represent the over-ruling divine providence of the poet's next lines:

"But that scaffold sways the future,  
And behind the dim unknown  
Standeth God amid the shadows,  
Keeping watch above His own."

God's name need not occur in a book in which His mighty power and saving grace are so vividly shown, as He preserves the race through which, "in the fullness of time," He was to give His Son for the deliverance of the whole world from death.

## JOB—THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

Victor Hugo calls the Book of Job "the greatest product of the human mind of all ages." Certainly it is the sublimest dramatic poem in all literature.

This book, which is probably one of the oldest books of the Bible, deals with one of the race's oldest problems—"Why do the godly suffer?"

Satan's sneer, "Doth Job fear God for naught?" could not be allowed to stand untested. Therefore Job's misfortunes are permitted by God for the purpose of vindicating Job's righteousness. From God's standpoint Job's sorrows and ours are a testing, from Satan's standpoint they are a tempting.

Job's steadfastness under trial proved that he did not serve God for wealth, family or health, for he was bereft of all of these, and even of the sympathy of his wife and friends, and yet maintained his integrity, crying, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Thus Job nailed the age-long lie that says, "Every man has his price."

Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, come to sympathize and stay to criticize. Their philosophy is poured out upon the sufferer in three rounds of speeches, to each of which Job replies in his own defense.

Their explanation of Job's suffering is that God is righteous and punishes the wicked and blesses the righteous. In answer Job voices a sentiment which



still rises to vex many a sufferer, namely, that the righteous often suffer while the wicked seem to enjoy greater prosperity than the godly.

The more Job's friends argue, the more personal they become and (as is still the case with such religious arguments) the less they accomplish.

Finally the new and more sane voice of Elihu is heard as he speaks of the educational value of suffering and prepares the way for God to speak out of the whirlwind which by this time darkens the stage. This is the voice which Job and every other godly sufferer longs to hear out of the storm.

Happy is the sufferer who can wait in patience until he hears God speak through the clouds, and in whose life sorrow and pain have borne their wonted fruit in making God's voice audible and His commands sweet.

Thus Job is vindicated and then turns about to minister to his friends, which he does, not after their method of arguing with them, but by praying for them, thus again pointing the way for us.

Job's example has given great comfort and courage to the sorrow-stricken in all ages, but the real Man of Sorrows is not Job but Jesus. He furnishes the answer to all Job's questions as to whether, if a man die he shall live again; He supplies Job's longing for a "Daysman" to stand between us and God and "lay his hand upon us both," for His humanity touches us while His deity touches God, thus making for us "at-one-ment."



## PSALMS—THE FIRST PRAYER BOOK

The Psalms not only stand exactly in the middle of our Bibles, but they are their very central shrine of worship for the saints of the Old Testament and those of the New as well.

They are not only the divinely inspired book of praise and prayer of the Old Testament, but they are as precious to the Christian as to the Jew.

The one hundred and fifty Psalms stand clearly divided into five books whose close is marked by the doxologies to be found at the end of Psalms 41, 72, 89, 106 and 150.

The Psalms begin with a beatitude, as does the Sermon on the Mount, and appropriately rise to a grand finale of praise in the group of songs known as the "Hallelujah Psalms."

It is doubtful if any human experience can be conceived today that has not its counterpart or remedy in one or more of the Psalms.

Hoary with the age of from two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half millenniums, they still have the freshness of the dew that fell this morning.

The Psalms breathe worship in every note. Here it is confession, elsewhere it is supplication, again it is reflection and anon it is praise, but always worship, the bringing of every conceivable human experience into the presence of God, whether joy or grief, trust or anxiety, hope or despair.

There are dirges written in minors and anthems pitched in majors.

There is no real possibility of anyone adequately analyzing the message of the Psalms for another. Each soul must FEEL the message for itself, and feel it as in the presence of God. One's favorite psalm, with the exception of the 23rd, which is always a favorite, depends upon his particular need at a given time.

In times of darkness it is the 27th; in danger the 91st; in discouragement the 34th or 86th; in joy the 96th, 100th or 150th; when seeking forgiveness the 51st; when rejoicing over forgiveness the 32nd; when thankful the 98th, 103rd or 104th; when "down in the dumps" the 130th. When we want to see God in His might it is the 68th; when we want to see Christ in His glory it is the 2nd or the 24th; when we want the fellowship of Christ in our sorrow it is the 22nd; when we are passing through the valley of the shadow of death we want the 23rd.

The Psalms must have been the favorite part of scripture even to our Lord and His apostles, for nearly two-thirds of the Old Testament quotations which they bring over into the New Testament are selected from the Psalms. They found Christ in the Psalms at every point.

So today the songs that live are those that sing of Him and of His grace. The best in music still centers about Him as in the Psalms. Christianity is of necessity a singing religion, and the explanation is

given by St. Paul in the words, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

## PROVERBS—A BOOK OF WISDOM

The Book of Proverbs, together with the books of Job and Ecclesiastes, constitute the "wisdom literature" of the ancient Hebrew people.

The first nine chapters, addressed to "My Son," give us a series of parental counsels commending the virtues of Wisdom and warning against the wiles of Folly.

Then follow a miscellaneous collection of 374 proverbs of Solomon and other collections ascribed to him, but gathered together by King Hezekiah and others after the death of Solomon, counseling purity, honesty, industry, reverence and every other conceivable phase of the life characterized by wisdom.

The key-note of the book is sounded in 1:7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge," a saying so true and fundamental that it should be adopted as a slogan and emblazoned over the entrance of every school and college building in the land.

The educator who ignores this fundamental principle has missed his calling: he should have been an animal trainer, instead of an instructor of beings who have inherited a spiritual and moral nature from their creation in the image and likeness of God.

The ignoring of this essence of Proverbs on the

part of many of those who make up the faculties of our high schools and universities is doing much to fill our penal institutions with the graduates of these places of learning.

The Book of Proverbs proves its divine origin in the fact that after three thousand years its counsels stand unassailable by modern psychology and pedagogy.

No one can successfully dispute the wisdom that says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

No better advice or advice more needed by the youth of today can be given than Solomon's counsel in which he emphasizes the place of the home in child training, "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother." Or yet again his wise counsel to the youth emerging from the home into the wider circles of companionship, "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not."

Parents who are reversing the commandment of Moses and obeying their children, might well heed the proverb, "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying," or "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod he shall not die."

This is old-fashioned counsel, but our need of resorting to it occasionally will be vouched for by many who deal with juvenile delinquents who have "enjoyed" too little of that sort of correction.

Whoever admires the wisdom of Solomon and yet

heeds not the counsel of David's greater Son, Jesus of Nazareth, should heed the warning of Matthew 12:42, "The queen of the South shall rise up in judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here."

## ECCLESIASTES—IS LIFE WORTH LIVING?

Beware of the religious faddist who quotes over much from the Book of Ecclesiastes! For you may prove almost any of the teachings of the materialist, the fatalist or the sensualist by isolating parts of the first eleven chapters of Ecclesiastes from "the conclusion of the whole matter" in the last chapter.

The familiar words of our railroad tickets, "not good if detached," should be written opposite almost everything in Ecclesiastes except the last chapter.

The expression "under the sun" occurs repeatedly in the first few chapters and becomes the key to the real message of the book.

Here we have the experience of Solomon as a man of the world, whose vision and desires are limited to things "under the sun," trying one experiment after another in his vain search for something that will really satisfy his soul.

The result of every one of these experiments is expressed in the plaintive wail "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

Thus, in the spirit of a typical prodigal in the far country of things "under the sun," Solomon seeks for satisfaction in a series of experiments in the realms of wisdom, pleasure, materialism, fatalism, pessimism, wealth and indifference.

All of these experiments yield the same result of disappointment and vanity.

Not until chapter eleven does he begin to get "out of the woods," where he can see that the things that really satisfy come not from "under the sun" but from above the sun.

When Solomon, probably in his old age, discovers the folly of these experiments which have filled much of his life, he seeks, in Ecclesiastes, to give youth the benefit of his folly and points out the "conclusion of the whole matter" to which he had "muddled through."

The advice of this prodigal, who has finally come to himself and returned to his Father, is, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."

Then, after giving us a most picturesque description of old age, he invites us to hear the "conclusion" to which all of his experiments have driven him, namely, that life is really worth living only to the one who "fears God and keeps His commandments, for this is the whole of man."

One "greater than Solomon" expressed the same conclusion, saying, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."



## THE SONG OF SOLOMON—THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE

In the "Song of Songs" we have one of the world's most beautiful and dramatic stories of true love.

It is the story of a simple country girl, a Shulamite, from the vineyards of the north country, who is taken from her home and her lover to be one of the numerous wives of King Solomon in Jerusalem.

However, the maiden resists every effort of Solomon to win her love away from the one to whom she has plighted her troth, whose praises she sings to all about her in her waking hours and of whom she dreams in her sleep.

Finally, after her love has stood every conceivable test, she is permitted to return to her lover in her simple country home.

Thus by her faithfulness she rebukes the polygamy of an oriental court, resists the empty pomp and pageantry of the world, and proves the truth of the words of St. Paul in his wonderful classic on love,—  
"Love Never Faileth."

In these days of marital unfaithfulness, resulting in an increasing divorce evil, when the ideas and ideals of our youth in the sacred matter of love are being molded so largely by "movie stars" who at

best are but "blind leaders of the blind," there is need of a return to the pristine purity of the love of the Shulamite and her rustic lover.

"For love is strong as death;  
' Jealousy is cruel as the grave:  
The flashes thereof are flashes of fire,  
A very flame of the Lord.  
Many waters cannot quench love,  
Neither can the floods drown it:  
If a man would give all the substance of  
his house for love,  
It would utterly be contemned."

The world is dying for "a little bit of love,"—true love of this sort between husband and wife, parent and child, neighbor and neighbor.

The sweet fragrance of this Shulamite's devotion to her lover has ever been held by the Jew to be a symbol of the relation that should exist between Israel and Jehovah, and to the Christian it symbolizes the faithfulness of the true Church, the Bride of Christ, to the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

He is the true "Rose of Sharon" and the "Lily Among Thorns," and the Church may sing of Him as fervently as did the Shulamite, "His banner over me is love."

This Bridegroom "loved the Church and gave Himself for it," and He will yet come again for His Bride, and "present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but it should be holy and without blemish."

In the meantime let the Church be true to her divine Lover, repulsing as did the Shulamite every attempt to alienate her affections from Him to whom she is betrothed.

## THE PROPHECY OF ISAIAH—THE GOSPEL OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Isaiah is rightly regarded as the greatest of the prophets, and one of the outstanding statesmen of the Hebrew people. Prophesying in the southern kingdom of Judah during the reigns of Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (779 to 690 B. C.) he frequently exercised more power than the kings themselves.

The Book of Isaiah divides into two sections: Chapters 1 to 39 (as many chapters as there are books in the Old Testament), breathing the Old Testament spirit of judgment and warnings; and, chapters 40 to 66 (as many chapters as there are books in the New Testament), breathing the New Testament spirit of grace and peace.

Conditions in Israel in Isaiah's day were a sad reflection upon God's people, yet strangely similar to modern conditions about us today.

The rich ground down the faces of the poor; their women were haughty and concerned chiefly with their false adornments; religion had become an empty form devoid of spirit; the kings depended on their arm of flesh and despised the arm of Jehovah, their true defense.

Isaiah saw Jehovah as the real ruler "sitting on a throne high and lifted up," but he failed to make either king or people believe his vision.

Even his prophecy of the Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel and its sad fulfillment in his time made little impression upon those who heard the warning.

Isaiah calls the roll of all the surrounding nations, Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Damascus, Egypt, Arabia and Tyre, and pronounces their doom and the reasons therefor, and still the people refuse to heed his warnings, but rush on to their own destruction with a pace slackened only slightly by the reforms of the good king Hezekiah, whose faithfulness was rewarded by Jehovah's intervention against the hosts of the Assyrian invader Sennacherib.

In the second section of the book Isaiah gives us the clearest picture of the Messiah, as the servant of Jehovah, to be found outside of the New Testament.

The heart of this section is the wonderful fifty-third chapter, which might well be called "the gospel according to Isaiah," with its picture of our Saviour as "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows, wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities."

Isaiah gives us in prophecy all of the "fundamentals" of Christ's life of which the New Testament tells us, namely, His virgin birth (7:14); His descent from David (9:7 and 11:1); His vicarious sufferings, death and continued life (chapter 53); His

second coming and final judgment (chapters 61 to 66); and a closing glimpse of the new heavens and the new earth (66:22).

No wonder, then, that when Philip found the Ethiopian riding in his chariot in the desert reading the book of Isaiah and desiring to have it explained, "he began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus."

## JEREMIAH—THE WEEPING PROPHET

Jeremiah was more than a prophet. He was a statesman, a patriot and a martyr. His was the sad ministry of accompanying a doomed nation to the death-chamber for its execution.

He prophesied during the reigns of the last five kings of Judah, the good king Josiah and his three wicked sons and grand-son, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah.

For half a century Jeremiah ceased not to warn king and people alike, even with tears, of the doom and destruction which must come upon them for their persistent idolatry.

But despite his warnings and the sad experience of the captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 B. C., they rushed on to a like fate, and God raised up Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem and carry the people away into captivity in Babylon for seventy years.

This captivity which Jeremiah prophesied so clearly and repeatedly came in 586 B. C., for with nations, as well as with individuals, "the wages of sin is death."

Jeremiah is called "the weeping prophet" from the way he poured out his soul in tearful pleadings and bitter lamentations in his effort to avert the captivity and destruction of his beloved people.



But his message to King Jehoiakim was cut into pieces and burned in the fire, a treatment of the Word of God not greatly different from that accorded it in some quarters today when it runs counter to the notions of the wilful and self-opinionated.

The prophet was charged with treason and with weakening the hands of the defenders of Jerusalem, and imprisoned and thrown into a filthy pit to die, had he not been rescued by his friends.

The burden of his message is embodied in the vision given him in the house of the potter. There in the vessel of clay whirling on the wheel, and marred in the hand of the potter, he saw the sad outcome of the Divine Potter's efforts to make of his nation a vessel of beauty and usefulness.

"The vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it." (18:2.)

This remaking of the marred vessel is the message of hope Jeremiah saw and preached through his tears.

God would not utterly destroy his people, but would bring them back after the seventy years and "make it again another vessel."

Jeremiah's passionate love for his people and his desire for their salvation, his rejection by his own whom he came to save, and his tears over the impenitence of Jerusalem and its approaching destruction, remind us of the greatest of all Judah's proph-

ets, Jesus of Nazareth, who "when He beheld the city wept over it" and said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."

## LAMENTATIONS—THE BIBLE “CROSS WORD”

In the Lamentations of Jeremiah we have Hebrew poetry at its best. For here we have five poetic dirges bemoaning the horrors of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar.

The literary form of these five poems will be noted even in the English translation in the number of verses of the five chapters, Chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5 each having twenty-two verses, or as many as there are letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and Chapter 3, three times this number.

In the Hebrew Bible these poems are acrostics, the stanzas beginning with the successive letters of the alphabet until all have been used once in the twenty-two stanza acrostics or three times in the sixty-six stanza acrostic of the third chapter.

This same peculiar form of Hebrew poetry is found also in the twenty-two eight line stanzas of the 119th Psalm and elsewhere in the Psalms and Proverbs.

The poetry of Lamentations is also to be noted in the balancing of contrasted ideas in its lines throughout, the dirge effect being secured by the weakening or shortening of the second part of the line, producing the musical effect of a *crescendo* followed by a *diminuendo*.

Truly the Bible, judged purely from a literary standpoint, is unexcelled among the literature of all ages, to say nothing of its moral and spiritual ministry to the soul of the devout reader who searches the scripture to find in it eternal life.

The message of Lamentations which Jeremiah soaked with his own tears is that "the way of the transgressor is hard," and "the wages of sin is death."

Everywhere he vindicates the righteousness of God's judgments upon the ruined city and its wretched inhabitants: "For the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions;" "Jerusalem hath grievously sinned, therefore is she removed;" "The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment."

But despite the fearfulness of the lament over the siege of the city, when, because of its famine, "the hands of pitiful women have sodden their own children" and "made them their meat in the destruction of the people," the weeping prophet is never without hope, or bereft of the assurance of God's merciful purpose in their punishment:

"This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.

It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed,

Because his compassions fail not.

They are new every morning;

Great is Thy faithfulness.

The Lord is my portion, saith my soul;  
Therefore will I hope in him." (3:21-24.)

Thus, even in this funeral dirge the notes of joy and hope and comfort have their place, for, as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

## EZEKIEL—THE EXILE PROPHET OF HOPE

As Isaiah is the statesman prophet of faith and Jeremiah the martyr prophet of love, Ezekiel is the exile prophet of hope.

The scene of his entire ministry was in the Babylonian Empire where he was carried with the second group of captives eleven years before the captivity was made complete in the destruction of Jerusalem.

The first twenty-four chapters of Ezekiel recount his call and prophecies during these eleven years, in which he sought in vain by his numerous parables and impersonations to convince his fellow-exiles of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the righteousness of God's judgment in destroying it.

The pageantry of his miniature siege of Jerusalem represented in the tile bearing the picture of the doomed city; the shaving of the prophet's hair and beard and the burning and cutting and casting to the winds of the three parts of the hair, symbolizing the fate of the inhabitants of the city; the prophet's enactment of the part of the fleeing exile escaping from the hole in the wall with his few personal effects; and his bereavement at the sudden death of his wife, at which he was commanded not to mourn, are but a few of the incidents of the prophet's ministry which make this book one of the richest in imagery in the divine library.

Everywhere, as he pronounces the doom and destruction of Jerusalem and pictures the horror of it all, the prophet vindicates the justice of God in the punishment of the people for their gross sins of idolatry and impurity, and repeatedly affirms the purpose of God, that by punishment the suffering people may learn to know him and come to repent and be saved. For no phrase occurs more often in the book than the words, "And ye shall know that I am Jehovah."

But all of this ministry of Ezekiel fell upon deaf ears. The exiles refused to believe that Jerusalem would fall until one of the refugees came with the sad news, "The city is smitten."

In the meantime the prophet pronounced the doom of the seven surrounding nations which had oppressed God's people, repeatedly indicating the purpose of this judgment also in his most familiar phrase, "They shall know that I am Jehovah." (Chapters 25 to 32.)

After the news of the destruction of Jerusalem reached the exiles Ezekiel's ministry met with a more favorable reception, and from Chapter 33 to the end we have his great gospel of hope in which he prophesies the restoration of God's ancient people to all their former glory.

The nation which is as a valley of dry bones shall live again; the ancient temple is seen restored and filled with the glory of the Lord which the prophet, in his earlier visions, had seen depart from it. The



altar and its offerings are restored and the prophet sees a great river of the water of life proceeding from the temple to bless the whole world.

He closes the book with a picture of the same heavenly city described by St. John in the Revelation, and names the city "The-Lord-Is-There."

How wonderful, that this clear vision of gospel hope which is fulfilled only in Jesus Christ, the "Prince" of Ezekiel's prophecy, should have come forth from the darkest hour of Israel's national history, the Babylonian captivity!

Truly, "Night brings out stars as sorrow shows us truth!—We never see the stars till we can see naught but them. So with truth."

## DANIEL—THE PROPHET OF THE LAST TIMES

Daniel was carried captive to Babylon in the first deportation, eight years before the deportation of Ezekiel, and like Ezekiel, his ministry was entirely outside Palestine, but unlike Ezekiel's, it was a ministry to powerful gentile rulers rather than to poor Jewish exiles.

Though of a despised subject race, Daniel rose to a position of dominating influence under four kings of three different nations, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar the Chaldeans, Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian.

Daniel's youthful courage of conviction regarding the king's meat and wine and his willingness in later life to be cast into the lions' den rather than change his custom of prayer to Jehovah were not isolated incidents of his life, but rather fair samples of the stuff of which he was made.

His interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the colossus with head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron and feet of iron and clay is the most wonderful panorama of world history ever given to the human mind by its Creator.

From Daniel's interpretation of this vision (chapter 2), together with that of the vision of the four beasts, the lion, bear, leopard and fearful fourth

beast (chapter 7), and the vision of the ram and the rough goat (chapter 8), it is known that the head of gold represents the Chaldean Empire, the breast and arms of silver the Medo-Persian Empire, the belly and thigh of brass the Grecian Empire, and the legs of iron the Roman world power, and the feet and toes of iron and clay the various world powers since the fall of Rome.

The significant part of the vision is that which is yet to come to pass when "the stone cut out of the mountain without hands," which represents the kingdom of Christ, shall smite the composite image and destroy it and then increase into a mountain filling the whole earth.

This is God's plan whereby "the kingdoms of this world are to become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." (Revelation 11:15.)

Another vision of Daniel whose fulfillment is still in the future is that of "the seventy weeks" recorded in Chapter 9.

These "weeks" are sevens of years and are divided into three periods: (1) The "seven weeks," or forty-nine years which saw the restoration of Jerusalem recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah; (2) the "three score and two weeks" or four hundred and thirty-four years "unto the Messiah the Prince," that is to the time of Christ, and (3) "one week" or seven years, a period still in the future, which will usher in the events attending the second coming of Christ.

When this "seventieth week of Daniel" will begin, Jesus said, "No man knoweth, not the angels in heaven, but my Father only."

But one of the signs of the end, Christ said, would be "the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet," and both Daniel and Christ prophesy his "coming in the clouds with power and great glory." (Daniel 7:13-14 and Matthew 24:30.)

Jesus says of this day, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." So, we are not to set dates for the second coming of Christ, but be ready at any time to meet him at his coming, with joy and not with trembling.

## HOSEA—THE BROKEN-HEARTED PROPHET

Hosea, whose prophecy is the first and longest of the group we call "Minor Prophets," was a contemporary of Amos in Israel and of Isaiah and Micah in Judah.

The period of his prophecy, 785 to 725 B. C., was one of great prosperity under King Jeroboam II, but one of great corruption of morals and shameful political conditions, four of the seven kings of his time having been murdered by those who succeeded them.

No prophet was ever more a part of his message than Hosea.

His unhappy domestic life with his unfaithful wife, Gomer, was not only a preparation for his ministry, but a parable to the nation of its spiritual adultery in forsaking Jehovah and resorting to the worship of false gods.

The broken-hearted prophet loved Gomer in spite of her persistent sin and life of shame, and even after her lovers abandoned her to be sold, Hosea found her in the slave-market and purchased her and forgave her all and took her again as the wife of his love.

Thus through his own grief God's messenger was prepared to understand the grief of Jehovah over the spiritual adultery of his people, and to know the

infinite love that made God willing to follow after Israel in his hope of winning them back to love and faithfulness.

The keynote of the message is struck in 4:1: "Jehovah hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land."

For this condition Hosea is unsparing in his denunciation of kings, priests and people. Then, as now, it was a case of "like people, like priest." The priests even encouraged sin that they might profit more from the offerings of the people.

Such mockery was an abomination to God, for "he desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings."

Hosea, by his clear prophecy of the Assyrian captivity as God's punishment for its idolatry, attempted to do for Israel what Jeremiah later attempted to do for the southern kingdom of Judah.

But his warnings fell upon deaf ears, and the nation rushed on to its destruction within five years from the time Hosea's voice was stilled.

Truly, "Ephraim was joined to his idols;" he was a "cake not turned," and yet God loved these people as passionately as Hosea loved the unworthy and unfaithful Gomer.

And when its destruction seemed inevitable, the heart of God sobbed out, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? Mine heart is turned within me, my compassions are kin-

dled together.” “Oh, Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help.”

The book closes with a final appeal to the prodigal nation and a promise of mercy: “Oh Israel, return unto the Lord thy God,” and “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely.”

This God will do for every sinner who repents and turns to His Son Jesus Christ, whose childhood exile in Egypt is prophesied by Hosea.



## JOEL—THE PROPHET OF PENTECOST

Joel was one of the earliest of the prophets of Judah, probably exercising his ministry near the times of Elijah and Elisha, about eight hundred years before Christ.

The burden of his message is a certain fearful time of judgment which he mentions five times as “the day of the Lord.”

The keynote of his prophecy is struck in 1:15, in the words, “Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.”

Joel made very vivid the desolation that God would send upon Judah and Jerusalem by likening God’s destroying hosts to a scourge of locusts which probably at the very time was spreading desolation and famine through the land, cutting off the food supply of man and beast, and making it difficult to secure even the sacrifices necessary to maintain the temple services.

In the shadow of the judgment of this “day of the Lord” Joel pleaded with priests and people alike to turn to the Lord in genuine repentance, saying, “Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.”

Joel prophesied not only things which were near

at hand, but also things which were not fulfilled until eight hundred years after his time, as well as things which are not yet fulfilled and will not be fulfilled until the final judgment attending the second coming of Christ.

It was one of these prophecies of Joel which the Apostle Peter took as his text for that wonderful sermon on the Day of Pentecost, and which he said was fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on that day: "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit." (Compare Joel 2:28-32 with Acts 2:16-21.)

Three thousand souls found the way of salvation in that pentecostal sermon through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and there is no other way of salvation for any of us.

Those who have not yet found it should earnestly heed the solemn words of Joel, where he says of them: "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."

## AMOS—A LAYMAN PREACHING JUDGMENT

Amos denied being either "a prophet or a prophet's son." He was a herdsman and dresser of fruit trees, a plain layman of the southern kingdom drafted by the Lord to preach judgment to the northern kingdom.

It was the period of great prosperity in the days of King Jeroboam II, and, as is usually the case, prosperity bred irreligion rather than godliness.

The burden of Amos is national accountability for national sins. God will bring every nation into judgment for its attitude towards him and its treatment of humanity.

Accordingly, he pronounces the judgment of God upon six surrounding gentile nations for the national sins that characterized them.

Finally he dealt with greater severity with the sins of Judah and Israel, because they had sinned against greater privilege and clearer light than their gentile neighbors had possessed.

The keynote of his message is struck in 3:1-2. "Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.' "

Among these iniquities of Israel which he denounces are the injustice of the rich to the poor, "because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes," "making the ephah small and the shekel great"; also the animalism of its women whom he addresses as "ye kine of Bashan"; and chief of all, the mockery of their pretense of worshiping God when their hearts were not right.

His bold challenge to the nation was, "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel."

To enforce his warning he pictured the coming destruction of the nation in five visions of judgment, namely, the locust plague and fire sweeping the nation; the plumb-line showing its crookedness; the basket of perishable fruit symbolizing its decay and the spiritual famine of God's withdrawal from the nation.

It is little wonder that such a plain preacher was invited to return to his own land and mind his own business.

But the judgment Amos predicted came to pass within fifty years in the captivity and destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel.

The book closes with a promise to "raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen and close up the breaches thereof; to raise up his ruins and build it as in the days of old."

In Acts 15:15-16 St. James quotes this promise of Amos and claims its fulfillment in Jesus Christ and His church made up of both gentiles and Jews.

## OBADIAH—THE DOOM OF EDM

Obadiah is the oldest and briefest of the writing prophets of the Old Testament.

The burden of his brief message is the sin and judgment of Edom.

To understand Obadiah one must know the age-long conflict between Esau and Jacob, the progenitors of these two hostile nations of Edom and Israel.

The very name "Edom," meaning "red," reminds us of the mess of red pottage for which Esau sold to Jacob the birthright which he despised.

Edom, therefore, stands for all the forces that hold spiritual things in contempt and despise God.

The Edomites dwelt in the rocky passes south of Judah and felt that no God was necessary for their protection. They hated Israel because Israel worshiped Jehovah.

Upon Israel's return from Egypt Edom had refused them passage through their borders, and Obadiah prophesied the way in which the Edomites would gloat over the destruction of Jerusalem and its captivity, and wrote to warn them against this policy of vindictive hatred.

The keynote of his message is in verse fifteen and is as applicable to any individual or nation today as it was to Edom of old: "For the day of the Lord

is near upon all the nations; as thou hast done it shall be done unto thee: thy dealing shall return upon thine own head."

A greater than Obadiah expressed the same eternal truth in the words, "With what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again."

But in all this age-long conflict between the forces of God and those against Him, between Edom, representing the carnalities, and Israel, representing the spiritualities, however the battle may go now and then, the ultimate outcome is sure. Good must triumph over evil, the spirit over the flesh, Jacob over Edom, Christ over anti-Christ.

"Upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. . . . And there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the Lord hath spoken it."

But even in this solemn warning of Edom's judgment the way of escape is pointed out by Obadiah in his closing word. An Edomite may still repent and be saved by the Saviour to come through the Jews and Mount Zion.

"And Saviours shall come up on Mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's."

King Herod, an Edomite, tried to slay the newborn King of the Jews but failed, and to his son and successor Jesus sent the message, "Go ye and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils."

“King Herod the Great” is in no sense either great or kingly in comparison with the real King he sought to destroy, for as Obadiah says in his closing word of triumph, “The kingdom shall be the Lord’s.”



## JONAH—THE “ELDER SON” OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The prophet Jonah was an early contemporary of Hosea and Amos in the northern kingdom of Israel in the prosperous days of Jeroboam II.

But the parish God assigned him was not among his own people, but in the hated city of Nineveh.

Jonah preferred to “demit the ministry” rather than to preach salvation to the Ninevites, whom he did not care to see saved.

Therefore he sought to run away from God and set sail for Spain.

God’s method of teaching him the impossibility of escaping the presence of Jehovah even in the depths of the sea has been a source of offense to some readers of the Book of Jonah.

But to those who admit the supernatural in religion, and especially to those who believe in the resurrection of Christ, of which Jonah’s experience in the sea, according to Christ’s own words, was but a type, there should be no such difficulty.

This book is the great foreign missionary sermon of the Old Testament.

Jonah was a typical Jew of his day. He had no sympathy with God’s plan to save this wicked heathen city.

And when the prodigal city repented at his un-

willing preaching and the Father rejoiced to save the prodigal, Jonah did exactly what the elder son in Christ's beautiful parable of the Prodigal Son did.

"He was angry and would not go in." Pouting in his booth overlooking the city, he even criticized the love that forgave the repentant returning prodigal.

"It displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed unto the Lord and said, 'I pray thee O Lord, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I hasted to flee unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and full of compassion, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, and repentest thee of the evil.' "

God's rebuke of the prophet, who could mourn for the destruction of the gourd vine that shaded his booth, but who had no pity for a great city, is God's rebuke of narrow, loveless exclusiveness in every age.

Contrast the picture of the angry, pouting prophet overlooking the repentant heathen city of Nineveh with that other picture of Jesus overlooking unrepentant Jerusalem: "When He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it."

His parable of the Prodigal Son was spoken to rebuke those of every age who have the spirit of Jonah, the selfrighteous elder sons who have no joy over the return of the prodigals.

## MICAH—THE CHAMPION OF THE PEOPLE'S CAUSE

Of Micah it might have been said, as it was said of the greater Prophet of whom he wrote: "The common people heard him gladly."

He was a younger contemporary of Isaiah in the days of Kings Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judah. But his message concerns the northern kingdom of Israel even more than it does the southern kingdom of Judah.

Micah was the fearless champion of the people's cause against all their civil, social and religious leaders who oppressed and wronged them in those days.

He bitterly denounced their princes who, as he says, "hate the good and love the evil; who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones; who also eat the flesh of my people; who abhor judgment and pervert all equity."

He was as severe in his arraignment of the false prophets who made his people err, "who divine for money," and who prophesied peace or war to the people, depending upon whether they were well paid or not.

He rebuked the dishonest merchants who enriched themselves by their "scant measures, wicked balances and deceitful weights."

For all these oppressors of his people he boiled

down his idea of true religion in the words, "to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God."

Micah was indeed the "commoner" of his day, the champion of the common people against those who wronged them politically, economically and religiously. His teachings are needed to right the same oppressions today.

As a result of the sins he denounced, he clearly prophesied the destruction of Samaria and the captivity which came within his own time.

But Micah had a vision of a better day, a day of universal peace and good will.

He saw coming out of the "little town of Bethlehem" a ruler in Israel who would be a true prophet, priest and king.

It was to Micah's prophecy, Chapter 5, verse 2, that the scribes turned to answer the question of King Herod and the wise men, "where Christ should be born": "But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel: whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

Thus Micah becomes the prophet we specially love to hear at Christmas time.

He, like Isaiah, his contemporary, tells us of the child born and the Son given, who is to be called "The Prince of Peace, of the increase of whose kingdom and peace there shall be no end."

Micah says of the Christ born in Bethlehem, "This man shall be the peace." "He shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid."

Such a vision and hope are indeed "good tidings of great joy to all people."

Little wonder that at the birth of this "Prince of Peace," the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

## NAHUM—THE DOOM OF NINEVEH

About two hundred years after Jonah had preached to the city of Nineveh, and threatened it with destruction, as a result of which the city repented and was spared, the Prophet Nahum was called to pronounce the doom and destruction of Nineveh for repenting of its repentance.

From scriptural accounts, amply corroborated today in the excavations of the ancient city of Nineveh, it is certain that Assyria and Nineveh, its capital, represented the utmost in all the forces opposed to God, the most cruel power that ever cursed the world.

Nineveh was at the height of her power and glory when Nahum wrote to comfort Judah's fears of what this cruel power might do to her.

The prophet's name, which means "Consoler" or "Comforter," is indicative of his message to his people in their fear of this "bloody city," as he calls it.

It is a stern, hard message of doom for a city that had sinned away its day of grace.

The keynote of the message of Nahum is sounded in 1:2-3, in the words, "The Lord is a jealous God and avengeth; the Lord avengeth and is full of wrath; the Lord taketh vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies. The Lord

is slow to anger, and great in power, and will by no means clear the guilty."

As Nineveh sowed so must she reap. This is the lesson of Nahum for men and nations today.

Her destruction to come was good news to Judah and to every other nation that feared her "for the noise of her whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the prancing horses, and of the jumping chariots."

This gospel of deliverance Nahum sang in the words, "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace."

From St. Paul's use of this text in Romans 10:15 we know that the destroyer of our spiritual Nineveh, the tyrant and oppressor of all of us, is Jesus Christ. He is the one "that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace."



## HABAKKUK—THE “JOB” OF THE PROPHETS

If the Patriarch Job and the Prophet Habakkuk had ever met they would have become bosom friends.

The problem of both was why a just and omnipotent God at times permits the wicked to flourish and the more righteous to suffer affliction at their hands.

With Job the problem was personal, while with Habakkuk it was the affliction of the nation that perplexed.

Herein lies the peculiarity of Habakkuk among the prophets, that while the others plead with the people in behalf of God, Habakkuk plead with God in behalf of the people.

The prophet's message is set forth in the form of a dialogue between himself and God, in which he reverently challenges God to show cause why he should allow the unspeakable Chaldean to afflict the more righteous nation of Judah.

Learning that the Chaldean was merely a tool of God's using for the purpose of disciplining Judah for its own shameful cruelties and the idolatry of those days of the wicked kings Manasseh and Amon, the perplexity of the prophet is only intensified. For why should the nation chosen to be the scourge be so immeasurably worse than the nation to be scourged?

The solution is found in what is the keynote of the book, Chapter 2, verse 4: "Behold his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith."

Granted that the Chaldean is haughty, and intoxicated with power, and the most crooked of nations, nevertheless, the righteous who wait patiently through the affliction in faith shall live, and live more abundantly than the wicked who oppress them.

No message is more needed today. It should be emblazoned on our bill-boards, as God told Habakkuk, "Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it."

In the midst of life's problems those who take snap judgment of the God whose mysteries they do not understand are apt to cry out with Habakkuk, "The wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth."

But faith discloses to the righteous that

"Behind the dim unknown,  
Standeth God within the shadow,  
Keeping watch above His own."

Therefore, faith's more mature counsel is given by Habakkuk in the words, "The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him."

Thus by faith he rises

"To the height of this great argument  
To assert eternal providence,  
And justify the ways of God to men."

Job found his way through the same mysteries of affliction and cried, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

Thus "the just live by faith." This is St. Paul's text for his two great epistles to the Romans and Galatians.

Jesus stated it in the words, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

## ZEPHANIAH—THE PROPHET OF JUDGMENT

Zephaniah prophesied about 630 B. C. in Judah in the early days of Jeremiah the prophet and of Josiah the good king and reformer.

His message is chiefly concerned with that great and terrible "day of the Lord" of which his predecessors Joel and Amos had so much to say.

For over half a century during the reigns of the wicked kings Manasseh and Amon, idolatry and all manner of wickedness had gone unrestrained and had all but exterminated the worship of the true God.

It was little wonder that the prophet saw in the ravages of the Scythian hordes, pouring down upon the neighboring nations, a harbinger of the fearful judgment that Judah deserved for her sins, and which she was to receive in that "day of the Lord."

The keynote of his message is struck in Chapter 1, verse 12: "And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil."

When God is thus ignored by princes and prophets and plain people there is need of their being warned of what Zephaniah called "a day of wrath, a

day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness."

There is need of their being reminded, too, as Zephaniah reminded them, that "neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath."

Unpopular preaching, indeed, for any age, but none the less wholesome and necessary!

Zephaniah, like Amos, prophesies the divine judgments to fall upon the surrounding gentile nations, but he goes further than any other Old Testament prophet in his vision of the conversion of the gentiles to the worship of Jehovah, and he is broad enough also not to demand that they come up to Jerusalem for their worship, but says, "Men shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen."

In this fine forward look into the universality and spirituality of true worship Zephaniah is not excelled until Jesus says to the Samaritan woman, "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth."

No prophet pictures judgment blacker than Zephaniah, but neither does any paint a brighter scene than the sunburst with which he closes his book as he sings of the glories of the Messianic Kingdom of

Jesus Christ: "The Lord hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the King of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee; thou shalt not see evil any more."

## HAGGAI—THE TEMPLE-BUILDING PROPHET

Haggai and Zechariah, his contemporary prophet, were both among the party of Jewish exiles who returned from the Babylonian captivity with Zerubabel in the year 536 B. C.

Immediately they restored the altar of Jehovah and its sacrifices and laid the foundations of the temple. Then came the opposition of enemies, the discouragement of the builders and the abandonment of the work for fourteen years, all of which we read in the Book of Ezra.

Meantime the people grew indifferent about completing the house of God, and became engrossed in making their fortunes and building fine houses for themselves.

Haggai was called as God's prophet to inspire the people to complete the temple.

His message consists of four addresses, all delivered within about three months, in the year 520 B. C.

The keynote of his message is in Chapter 1, verse 8: "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord."

The people were attempting to hide their indifference to the interests of God's house behind the pretense that "the psychological moment" for temple



building had not yet come: "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built."

Haggai's first effort was to shame them into immediate action by contrasting their own "ceiled houses" with the heap of ruins that marked the site of God's house.

Very soon the pendulum swung to the opposite extreme. The people who for years were satisfied to have no temple, were now dissatisfied because the temple they were building was not to be as glorious as Solomon's temple, which some of the oldest of the exiles had seen.

Through Haggai God assured them that "the glory of this latter house should be greater than of the former," because "the desire of all nations should come and fill this house with glory."

The fact that Jesus Christ should come to the temple they were building would more than make up for its material inferiority to Solomon's temple.

The builders then began to barter for increased prosperity because of their piety represented in their temple building. Like the Apostle Peter they were saying, "We have left all and followed thee: what shall we have therefore?"

Haggai's third address was to correct this mercenary spirit by reminding them of the years of defilement of their sin and counseling them to wait more patiently for God's blessing.

On the same day he uttered his final address to quiet their fears of the surrounding nations and

their armies. They were to look to God as their defense, for he had promised: "I will shake the heavens and the earth."

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (12: 26-28) quotes this text and applies it to what Jesus Christ is yet to do when He comes to displace the kingdoms of earth with the Kingdom of Heaven that cannot be shaken.

## ZECHARIAH—THE OLD TESTAMENT'S “BOOK OF REVELATION”

Zechariah was a contemporary with Haggai and associated with Zerubbabel in the rebuilding of the temple in the discouraging years following the return from exile in Babylon.

This book deals almost exclusively with the Jew, and should be studied by all who are inclined toward anti-semitism, to show them what glorious plans God still has for Israel. For it shows a day coming when “ten men out of all languages of the nations, shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, we will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.” Therefore, those who would persecute the Jew because he is a Jew should read Zechariah and “watch their step”!

The first eight chapters record a series of visions given the prophet to strengthen the people in circumstances which would have been disheartening but for the hope of victory he showed them afar off.

The vision of the man among the myrtles is a picture of God’s watchful care over Israel in this present age.

The vision of the four horns and the four “carpenters” or carvers raised up to destroy them stands for nations that have oppressed the Jew and the instruments chosen of God to discipline these nations.

The vision of the measuring line predicts a new Jerusalem that cannot be measured, and whose protecting wall is the presence of God.

The vision of Joshua clothed with filthy rags and then cleansed symbolizes the cleansing of Israel preparatory to its future ministry in the day of Christ the Branch.

The vision of the candlestick represents Israel supplied with the spirit of Christ enlightening the world.

The vision of the flying roll represents the future reign of divine law throughout the earth.

The vision of the ephah represents the final restraint to be put upon the evils of commercialism.

The vision of the four chariots represents the administration of Jehovah through the crowning of the true Joshua and Branch, Jesus Christ.

Zechariah was not strong for fasts to commemorate the destruction of the former temple and city, but he was strong for faithfulness in the completion of the restored temple, and for reformation from the sins which necessitated the former destruction and captivity.

Therefore, his keynote, sounded in 1:3, was, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts."

The last six chapters contain a marvelous portrayal of the first advent of Christ in its humiliation, suffering and death, all wondrously fulfilled in

the experiences of our Saviour, in His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the betrayal for thirty pieces of silver, the disposal of the blood money for the potter's field, the piercing, the wounds in the hands and the cleansing fountain thus opened for sin in the house of David.

He gives as marvelous a delineation of Christ's second advent in great glory to set up his kingdom on the earth.

No prophet save Isaiah gives us so clear a picture of Christ in the Old Testament, and no other is so repeatedly quoted in the New Testament.

His vision into the glories of the future kingdom is excelled only by that granted to St. John, six hundred years later, on the Island of Patmos and recorded in the Revelation, which is an echo of the Book of Zechariah.

## MALACHI—CONCEITED FAILURES

The books of Malachi and Nehemiah should be read together, for they form respectively the last pages of Old Testament prophecy and history, born of the same social and religious corruptions and at almost the same time.

Malachi ministered about four hundred years before Christ, and but a few years after the close of Nehemiah's ministry.

Both dealt with the priests' defilement of their office, the people's defilement of the home through mixed marriages with idolaters, and the general contempt for and neglect of the offerings and services of God's house.

The key which unlocks the message of Malachi is the word "wherein," which is found in the book seven times in as many impudent and arrogant replies of the people in which they deny the prophet's charges against them: "*Wherein* hast thou loved us?" 1:2; "*Wherein* have we despised thy name?" 1:6; "*Wherein* have we polluted thee?" 1:7; "*Wherein* have we wearied him?" 2:17; "*Wherein* shall we return?" 3:7; "*Wherein* have we robbed thee?" 3:8; and (in the Revised Version) "*Wherein* have we spoken against thee?" 3:13.

Thus the people entered a general denial to all the prophet's charges of religious, moral and social cor-

ruption. In their self-righteousness they were utterly unconscious of any fault in the matters for which he rebuked them.

Surely, this was the darkness of spiritual night, but it was that darkest hour which just precedes the dawn.

The first faint streaks of that dawn are indicated in Malachi's prophecy of Christ's near approach, preceded by his forerunner, John the Baptist: "Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts."

Then from his mountain top of prophetic vision Malachi spies the full glory of the approaching sunrise, and with a joyous shout announces it to the people lying in darkness: "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings."

Four hundred dark years of oppression and cruelty were suffered by the Jews at the hands of various world powers before the fulfillment of this prophecy of the sunrise in the coming of Him who claimed, "I am the light of the world."



## MATTHEW—THE STORY OF JESUS CHRIST AS KING

Our Bibles do not contain “four gospels,” for there is but one gospel of Jesus Christ, and that “good story” or “gospel” is related by four different evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all writing to different nationalities to portray Jesus Christ from four different standpoints.

Matthew, a former tax collector, wrote to the Jews to prove to them that Jesus of Nazareth was the king of the Jews and the Messiah of Jewish prophecy, in whose life and death the Old Testament prophecy and ritual of the Jews were fulfilled.

His characteristic expression, therefore, is “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying.”

Matthew gives us sixty quotations from the Old Testament.

It is, therefore, logical that Matthew, though not written first, should stand first among the twenty-seven books of the New Testament.

Its opening verse is a door which swings backward into the Old Testament as well as forward into the New Testament: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

When Matthew left the custom-house he brought with him more than his pen and ink. He brought the ability to classify and codify parables, miracles, ser-

mons and teachings through which runs a common thought, for his biography of Christ is written topically rather than chronologically.

In developing his great theme of the kingship of Jesus, he first writes of the Person of the King (1:1 to 4:16); then of the Program of the King and his Kingdom (4:17 to 16:20); and finally of the Rejection of the King and his crucifixion under the title, "This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews" (16:21 to 28:20).

True to his purpose of convincing his fellow Jews that Jesus was their Messiah, he traces his genealogy not from Adam, as Luke does, but from Abraham, the great father of all the Jews.

He alone records the visit of the magi who came seeking the king of the Jews.

He shows in Jesus' life the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of the virgin birth and incarnation; of Micah's prophecy of Bethlehem as the birth-place; of Jeremiah's prophecy of the slaughter of the innocents; of Isaiah's prophecy of the ministry of the forerunner, John the Baptist, and so on through his life to the very end in the betrayal, death and resurrection, Matthew matches the Old Testament prophecies with their complete fulfillment in the one he seeks to prove is the king of the Jews.

The essence of Matthew is given in both the message of Jesus and of his forerunner: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Fifty times he uses the word "kingdom" in this connection.

This theme of kingship which characterizes all that Matthew wrote of Jesus led the early Christians to adopt the lion as the symbol to represent Matthew in the art of the early church.

The theme of royalty is sustained to the very final note in the triumphant risen king's own claim of universal dominion on which he based his great commission to his disciples to evangelize all nations to his standard: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth."

## MARK—THE STORY OF JESUS CHRIST AS THE SERVANT OF GOD

John Mark was the young companion and servant of the Apostle Peter who wrote the story of Jesus after that apostle's death, as he had often heard it from his lips.

He wrote in Rome and for the Romans, as is evidenced by his frequent use of Latin terms in explanation of Jewish words and customs.

He does not often refer to the Old Testament prophecies, as Matthew does, for the Romans knew little of these prophecies and cared less. For the same reason he gives no genealogy of Jesus as Matthew and Luke do for those to whom they wrote.

To the Romans the great things of life were action, service, efficiency, and Mark seizes this as his opportunity to picture Jesus Christ to them appealingly as the mighty wonder working servant of God.

Mark's key expressions are "straightway" or "immediately," which, with kindred expressions, occur forty-two times in his story.

His keynote is sounded in 10:44-45 in the words, "Whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

As befits the story of a servant, Mark is character-

istically a gospel of deeds rather than of discourses. He has room for twenty miracles and references to many more, but he finds room for only four parables.

Jesus and his disciples are constantly at work. If he seeks rest from the work by retirement to the desert his purpose is defeated by the throngs for whom he works a miracle; or if his rest comes in sleep during the storm at sea it is disturbed by his disciples to perform for them the mighty work of stilling the tempest.

Thus disease, demons, darkness of the soul and depths of the sea are wrought upon by this ministering servant of God, to the good of men and the glory of God. If you want to find in a nutshell this "Petrine Gospel" of works, as Mark is called, you can read it in Peter's own words in Acts 10:36-43.

Mark even removes the offense of the cross from the Roman mind by showing it as the culmination of all his service for humanity, and reminding them that the Roman centurion in charge of the crucifixion went away from the cross saying, "Truly this man was the Son of God."

Little wonder then that the early Christians used the ox as the symbol to represent Mark's gospel in the art of the early Church, for the ox represented both service and sacrifice, as the lion represented the kingship of Jesus as set forth by Matthew.

With Mark the working of Jesus did not cease even with his resurrection and ascension, for after

he was “received up into heaven and sat on the right hand of God, and his disciples went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord worked with them confirming the word with signs following.”

## LUKE—THE STORY OF JESUS CHRIST AS THE IDEAL MAN

Luke, "the beloved physician," was a Greek scholar who wrote the story of Jesus to his Greek friend Theophilus, as he had learned it in his companionship with St. Paul, the great apostle and missionary to the gentiles.

The great "hobby" of the Greeks was perfect manhood, and Luke, finding the perfection of manhood in Jesus, wrote to the Greeks to commend him to them as the ideal man, the Son of Man, the Saviour and perfecter of all men.

Luke finds the keynote of all the sayings of Jesus in the words he records in Chapter 19, verse 10, "For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Luke sees Jesus as the Saviour of all, of gentiles and Samaritans as well as of Jews, a Saviour whose special interest seems to be in the poor and outcasts, the women and children, and all the prodigal sons of the race. His is the universal gospel.

Consequently, his genealogy of Jesus is traced back to Adam to show that he belongs to all humanity, whereas Matthew was satisfied to stop his genealogy with Abraham to show that Jesus belongs to the Jewish race.

Luke tells the story of the birth of Jesus from



the standpoint of Mary, Matthew from the standpoint of Joseph. He has room for the story of the birth of John the Baptist. He alone records the presentation of the Christ child in the temple in infancy and his visit to the temple at the age of twelve.

These and many similar incidents have brought Luke the distinction of writing the gospel of womanhood and childhood in a day when these were little esteemed.

Similarly, Luke champions the cause of the poor and the outcasts.

He alone records the parables of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Rich Fool, the Pharisee and Publican, the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son.

These incidents, which escaped the other evangelists, as well as those which Luke records in common with others, show the trend and purpose of Luke's story. He paints Jesus Christ as the ideal man who belongs to all humanity as its brother and Saviour, and who would have all belong to God. He is the perfect man who has come to perfect even the outcast and the publican.

Had he recorded nothing more than that most beautiful of all stories, the Prodigal Son, he would have won the everlasting gratitude of the race for his gospel of hope.

The early church caught this spirit and purpose of Luke's gospel and made the face of a man the symbol to represent Luke in the art of the church as the lion and the ox represented Matthew and Mark.

In his first two chapters Luke has recorded the first five Christian hymns, and the rest of his story of the man Jesus Christ has put a song into the hearts of innumerable thousands of the poor, the publicans and the prodigals, who otherwise would have been able to find in their hearts or hopes nothing to inspire a song.

## JOHN—THE STORY OF JESUS CHRIST AS SON OF GOD

John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," was well qualified to give us such a picture of Jesus as no other could ever have painted.

He sounds the deepest depths of the spiritual teachings of Jesus, and carries us to the loftiest heights of revealed truth.

The purpose he had in writing is quite clearly stated in what is the keynote of his message, in Chapter 20, verse 31: "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

True to this purpose, he traces Christ's genealogy not from Abraham, as Matthew does, nor back to Adam, as Luke does, but back to God in the eternities: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

So John's is the gospel of Christ's deity, as Luke's is the gospel of his humanity, and Matthew's of his kingship and Mark's of his servanthship.

He tells of the mystery of the incarnation of deity in humanity in the simple words, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth."

To prove his case John summons as witnesses God

the Father, Christ himself, his forerunner, his disciples, his miracles, the Old Testament scriptures and the Holy Spirit.

He records seven great "signs" or miracles wrought by Christ before his death, of which only one had been mentioned by the "synoptists" Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Likewise he records seven great claims of Jesus, most of which are closely associated with the miracles which served as proofs of his right to make such claims as none but God could presume to make.

These claims in his own words are: "I am the Bread of Life;" "I am the Light of the world;" "I am the door;" "I am the Good Shepherd;" "I am the Resurrection and the Life;" "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life," and "I am the Vine, ye are the branches."

The religious leaders who failed or refused to see in him more than humanity regarded these claims as blasphemy, and brought about his crucifixion. Thus "the light shone in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not," but tried to extinguish it by the cross.

But the light overcame the darkness and burst forth gloriously and victoriously in the resurrection, and many believed on him and boldly confessed with "doubting Thomas," saying, "My Lord and my God."

Because of the heights of heavenly mysteries into which John takes us, the early church selected the

eagle to represent him in its art, as it had chosen the lion, the ox and the man to represent Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Those who read this gospel prayerfully will not wonder that one of the greatest leaders the church has ever had has called John "the master evangelist," and his gospel "the one true, tenderest, chief gospel, a commentary and exposition of the whole Bible."

## THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES—THE FIRST HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

The Acts of the Apostles might more properly be named “The Acts of the Ascended Christ,” or “The Acts of the Holy Spirit Through the Church.” Its seventy-one references to the Holy Spirit almost entitle it to be named “The Gospel of the Holy Spirit.”

It records the history of the early Christian Church from the ascension of Christ to the imprisonment of Paul in Rome about thirty years later.

St. Luke, in his gospel, had recounted “what Jesus *began* both to do and teach *until* the day in which he was taken up.” Here in the Acts he recounts what Jesus *continued* both to do and teach *after* his ascension.

Chapter 1, verse 8, gives us not only the keynote of the entire book, but indicates its plan and outline as well: “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses to me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

Chapters 1 and 2 tell of the reception of the promised power on the Day of Pentecost; the witness in Jerusalem is recorded in 3:1 to 6:7; the witness in Judea in 6:8 to 8:3; the witness in Samaria in 8:4 to 8:40; and the witness “to the uttermost part of the earth” in Chapters 9 to 28.

The two chief witnesses for Christ in this book are Peter and Paul, the first twelve chapters being given chiefly to the witness of Peter in and about Jerusalem, the last sixteen chapters dealing with the witness of Paul "unto the uttermost part of the earth."

In the Petrine section the church is seen developing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit from a pronouncedly Jewish sect into a broad cosmopolitan body where all racial distinctions between Jew and gentile are obliterated.

In the Pauline section the church becomes predominantly gentile in its spirit and membership through the fiery zeal and ceaseless activity of Paul, the great missionary and apostle to the gentiles, whose three missionary journeys are recorded.

The Acts records how the conviction of the resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit transformed Peter the cowardly denier into the courageous pentecostal preacher, and Saul the church's chief persecutor into Paul its chief apostle and missionary.

By such Spirit-filled witnesses the church spread out, as Christ commanded that it should, from Jerusalem, its birth-place, to Samaria to break down an ancient prejudice, and on to Ephesus to purify it of the vulgarities of Diana, thence over into Europe to Athens and Corinth to supplant Greek culture with the nobler culture of the Christian ethic, and finally even to Rome, the center of world power.



Thus "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved," not only individuals but nations, until, as his enemies charged, his disciples had "turned the world upside down."

All this they did against terrific persecution from both Jew and gentile. "The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church," verifying the promise of the great Head of the church that the gates of Hell should not prevail against his church.

## ROMANS—THE WAY OF SALVATION IN SIX GREAT WORDS

The Epistle to the Romans, which Coleridge calls "the profoundest book in existence," was written by the Apostle Paul from Corinth about the year 56 A. D., after he had been a Christian about twenty years.

Undoubtedly it is Paul's masterpiece and one of the chief books of the New Testament.

The "keynote" is sounded in 1:16-17: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth: to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.' "

From this fundamental statement Paul evolves the profound argument of the epistle which may be summarized in six great words, namely, "condemnation, justification, sanctification, glorification, restoration and consecration."

"*Condemnation*" is what all men deserved because of their unrighteousness. The wrath of God was incurred by all through ungodliness. "That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." This is the argument up to 3:20.

“*Justification*” is the way by which condemnation is removed, and the righteousness of God imputed to the unrighteous through faith alone in Jesus Christ without the deeds of the law. “As by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to *condemnation*: even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto *justification*.” This is the argument from 3:21 to 5:21.

“*Sanctification*” and not license will be the result of this abounding grace of justification. “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.” Rather, the justified believer “walks not after the flesh, but after the Spirit,” and “through the Spirit mortifies the deeds of the body.” This process of sanctification is dealt with in 6:1 to 8:13.

“*Glorification*” is the goal of justification and sanctification. Our glory is that we are the “children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” “Whom he *justified*, them he also *glorified*.” Thus the argument proceeds in 8:14-39.

“*Restoration*” is the word that sums up the argument Paul makes in Chapters 9 to 11 for the solution of the “Jewish Question.” God hath not cast away his ancient people Israel. “Because of unbelief they were broken off,” but “they also, if they abide not still in unbelief shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again.” This is *Restoration*.

“*Consecration*” is the great practical word which sums up the last five chapters and to which all the

doctrinal words of the first eleven chapters lead up. It shows the manner in which Paul would make doctrine the motive power of practice: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Thus it is with all of Paul's great epistles: first comes "doctrine," and afterwards "practice," and between these, like a golden hinge, a "therefore," showing that doctrine is the root, and practice the fruit of Christianity.

Let no man despise doctrine, for it is the foundation of life, and let not those who confess the Christian doctrine fail to translate it into consecrated Christian living.

## FIRST CORINTHIANS—FAULTS CORRECTED

In the eighteenth chapter of The Acts we read of the eighteen months' ministry of Paul in the city of Corinth on his second missionary journey. During this time he founded the church to which he wrote this letter from Ephesus about three years later, probably in the Spring of the year 57.

While we call it "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," it was preceded by an earlier epistle, now lost, to which Paul refers in 5:9. In reply to this earlier epistle Paul's advice was asked on a number of questions of vital importance to the Christians of Corinth.

To answer these questions as well as to correct certain faults of the church of which Paul had heard he wrote this letter.

The first four chapters correct the party spirit which had divided the Corinthian Christians into rival factions bearing the names of Paul, Apollos, Peter and Christ. Paul's cure for this fault then and now was that all human teachers should be submerged and lost in Christ "as ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."

Chapters 5 and 6 correct the immorality existing unrebuked in the church and also the fault of church members going to law before heathen tribunals to settle their differences.

Chapter 7 answers questions they had asked about the married relation, its advantages and disadvantages, its use and abuse in the immoral surroundings of the Corinthians of that day.

Chapters 8 to 10 proclaim in a masterly manner the interrelation of the fundamental social principles of liberty and love for the guidance of the Christian's conduct in "things questionable." "Personal liberty" is not to be allowed to place a stumbling-block in the way of the weaker brother. The law of love is supreme even over liberty. "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." Paul's rule for the determination of a Christian's duty in "things questionable" is still unexcelled, namely, "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

Chapters 11 to 14 correct their abuse of the Lord's Supper and their misuse of spiritual gifts and the rivalry between those possessing different gifts. The controlling principle is ever to be love, on which Paul writes a classic in the thirteenth chapter which is unexcelled in all literature. "Love never faileth." Truly, it is "the greatest thing in the world."

Chapter 15 is the great resurrection chapter with its grand doxology of victory for the Christian over sin, death and the grave. "O, Death, where is thy sting? O, Grave, where is thy victory? . . . Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is the climax of the doctrine of the epistle, which Paul immediately hitches up to practice: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."



## SECOND CORINTHIANS—PAUL'S DEFENSE OF HIS MINISTRY

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians had the desired effect of correcting the moral and spiritual faults at which it aimed, and within a few months afterward he wrote the second letter to tell them of the comfort their repentance had brought him.

But Paul had enemies at Corinth who sought to turn the Corinthian Christians against him for writing letters instead of coming to them in person. They ridiculed his appearance and mannerisms, disparaged his apostleship and questioned his authority and sincerity.

Paul's replies to these criticisms make this letter the most severe of all his letters with the single exception of his letter to the Galatians. Certainly no other of his letters is so full of heart throbs as is this one.

The keynote of the letter is in Chapter 4, verse 5: "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

In the first seven chapters Paul gives a defense of his ministry. It had been a triumphant ministry, the Corinthians themselves, in their changed manner of life, being his letters of commendation. His was a ministry whose only motives were the fear of God and the constraining love of Christ. It was an un-

selfish ministry, for he sought not theirs but them, maintaining himself by his trade as a tent-maker. "Giving no offense in anything that the ministry be not blamed."

In chapters 8 and 9 he deals with the offering being gathered throughout the churches for the relief of the poor Christians of Jerusalem.

To inspire the Corinthians with the true spirit of liberality he cited the example of liberality of the Macedonians, relating how "in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality," because "they first gave their own selves to the Lord."

He tapped the fountain of all true charity by saying, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich," and closes the subject with the shout, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." The giver who remembers Calvary will give not only liberally but "hilariously."

In the last four chapters Paul returns to the subject of his ministry to vindicate his apostleship, which his enemies had called into question.

His "bodily presence might be weak and his speech contemptible," but nevertheless he was commended by Christ himself in most marvelous visions and revelations granted him, as well as by the manifest way in which Christ had attended him in all his per-

secutions, perils and imprisonments. Christ had honored his ministry in the extension of the Church in such a way as to place Paul "not a whit behind the very chiefest apostle." He apologizes repeatedly for the apparent boasting to which his opponents have driven him in the defense of his ministry.

Though the letter is most severe in parts it closes with the richest of the scriptural benedictions, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all."

## GALATIANS—LAW AND GRACE

The Epistle to the Galatians is the great Magna Charta of Christian liberty. Here Paul champions the cause of spiritual liberty for those who were once emancipated by the gospel he had preached, and very shortly afterward brought again into bondage by certain Judaizing teachers who were more Jew than Christian.

The Galatian letter is the forerunner and the epitome of the letter to the Romans. The theme stated briefly in Galatians and expanded in Romans is justification by faith alone without the works of the law.

The keynote of the letter is struck in Chapter 2, verse 16: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

Paul marvels at the fickleness of the Galatians for having been swept away from the true gospel he had preached to another gospel which was really not a gospel, and he cries, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?"

The false teachers who had undone so much of Paul's work made it necessary for him to defend his apostleship by showing that it had been received di-

rectly from Christ and had been recognized by the other apostles as on a par with their own. Such defensive matters make up the first two chapters.

In Chapters 3 and 4 Paul assumes the offensive and carries the war into the enemy's territory by proclaiming the doctrines of grace and liberty of the gospel as contrasted with the restrictions and bondage of the Mosaic law.

The law was temporary and never intended to be abiding; it was the scaffolding, not the permanent building. When the child reaches his majority the guardian loses his position. So Paul reasons that "the law was our school-master to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come we are no longer under a school-master." After the concrete is "set" the forms which gave it shape are removed.

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." This is a real "Emancipation Proclamation" for every Christian.

The last two chapters are an exhortation to make practical use in life of the liberty proclaimed. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

Neither are they to turn this liberty into license, but they are to "walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lust of the flesh," but rather, "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts."

To illustrate how this must be done Paul shows

them the three crosses of the Christian's perpetual Calvary with the cross of Christ central and about it on either side a cross for the world of sin and one for self: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

## EPHESIANS—THE CHURCH LETTER

At Ephesus was located the great temple of Diana of the Ephesians, which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Paul writes the Epistle to the Ephesians from his prison in Rome to show them that in the Christian Church they had a temple infinitely more glorious.

Ephesians is pre-eminently the church epistle. If the critics of the church knew this letter better they would criticize less; and if the church members knew it better there would be less room for criticism.

The first three chapters are doctrinal, and deal with the divine creation of the church; the last three chapters are practical, and deal with the human conduct of the church.

In Chapter 1 Paul shows the "blue-prints" of the church drawn in heaven in the eternities "before the foundation of the world." According to the divine Architect's plan Jesus Christ was "given to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all."

In Chapter 2 is shown the construction of the church in accordance with this eternal plan. The marvel of it all is that this glorious temple is built entirely of waste material, which was once "dead in trespasses and sins," given over to "the lusts of the flesh" and "by nature the children of wrath." This



material, whether of Jewish or gentile extraction, is welded "into one body by the cross," and "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord."

In Chapter 3 he goes on to point out the glorious ministry of the church: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." To throw light outward to enlighten men would be glory enough, but to the church is given the further glory of throwing this light upward to enlighten angels in the heavenly places as to what grace can do for sinners.

Then let those in the seat of the scornful mock and belittle the church! Her glory still abides as the spiritual temple of God, the body of Christ, of which He is still both the head and the chief corner-stone.

Paul begins the practical part of the epistle by enjoining the Ephesians to preserve the unity of the church because there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all."

They are to put off the old man with its lusts and put on the new man of the regenerate life. They are to be imitators of God as dear children and are to walk as children of light.

Thus he outlines the life to be lived by wives, husbands, children, servants, all who make up this glorious church.

To do this will require conflict, for which God has provided a sufficient armor in the “girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the sandals of the gospel, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Equipped with this whole armor of God the Christian will be “able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

## PHILIPPIANS—PAUL'S "JOY LETTER"

Philippians is pre-eminently the "love letter" of all Paul's epistles, the freest from censure and the fullest of tenderness and expressions of affection.

The church to which it was sent was the first Christian church in Europe, established by Paul on his second missionary journey ten years before.

The Philippians had never forgotten their debt of gratitude to Paul. Repeatedly they had sent gifts to sustain him in his work, and, now that he was a prisoner of Nero in Rome, they sent Epaphroditus with an offering to relieve his prison hardships. Later they were distressed to learn that their messenger had taken sick in Rome and was at the point of death. Paul, hearing of their anxiety, wrote this letter to thank them for their gift and the love it expressed.

The predominant note of the letter is joy, rejoicing, gladness, these and kindred expressions occurring twenty-four times.

It was at Philippi ten years before that Paul and Silas, with their backs still bleeding from their scourging, sang in their dungeons at midnight, and this letter is another such a "song in the night," for it too is a joy song from a prison cell. It is a case of one who was "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, poor yet making many rich, having nothing and yet possessing all things."

Paul tells us the secret of this unconquerable joy in Chapter 1, verse 21, which is the keynote of the epistle: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

If his imprisonment enables him the better to witness for Christ, then nothing could bring him more joy than imprisonment. He never thinks of himself as Nero's prisoner but as the "prisoner of Jesus Christ." If death brings him home to be with Christ, then death will be welcomed with joy though it come by way of Nero's sword. If the lack of all things on his part brings glory to Christ, then Paul will rejoice in his poverty and hardships.

Real joy is to be found not in *things* but in *Christ*. Therefore, Paul says, "*Rejoice in the Lord* always: and again I say rejoice."

Do we want to be able to rejoice always, regardless of our outward circumstances? Do we covet the spirit of contentment with our lot, even though it be the bondage of sickness, poverty or persecution? Paul points the way saying, "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross."

This was the mind of Christ—a mind of serving love and self-sacrifice, and it is the only way that

leads to true contentment and abiding joy. Having this mind of Christ, Paul could say, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content."

Christianity and "a long face" do not belong together. But Christianity and joy are inseparable mates, and Paul's message to the Philippians concerning these two is "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

## COLOSSIANS—CHRIST PRE-EMINENT

The Epistle to the Colossians is companion to the Epistle to the Ephesians, written at the same time and sent by the hand of the same messenger.

In Ephesians Paul writes of the glory of the church as the body of Christ, while in Colossians he writes of the glory of Christ as the head of the church.

Paul had neither founded nor visited the church at Colosse, but he heard from them through Ephraim and wrote commending them for their faith and to warn them of certain dangers from false teaching that beset them.

There were those at Colosse, as among the Galatians, who sought to enslave the Colossians with legalistic observances of Sabbaths and New Moons and other ritualism.

Other false teachers advocated the worship of angels, still others who saw evil in all matter denied the creatorship of God and the deity of Jesus Christ and practiced a slavish asceticism.

To correct these errors Paul wrote this Epistle to proclaim Christ's deity and pre-eminence in all things.

The keynote of the letter is found in Chapter 2, verses 9 and 10: "For in Him (Christ) dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and in Him

ye are made full, who is the head of all principality and power.”

It is difficult to see how in that day or this there could be denial of the deity of Jesus Christ in the face of such positive statements as Paul makes to the Colossians that Christ is “the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation, for in Him were all things created in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible.”

Paul’s passion for Christ was that the Colossians “crown Him Lord of all,” for he says, “He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence. For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell.”

Not only is Christ the fullness of the Godhead in Himself, but this fullness avails for the Christian: “In Him ye are made full.”

Thus Paul sets forth the doctrine of the deity, sufficiency and pre-eminence of Christ in the first part of the letter and then, as in his other epistles, he turns to the practical application of the doctrine to life, the doctrinal and the practical being connected by his customary “therefore,” like a golden hinge between the two: “Mortify, *therefore*, your members which are upon the earth.” “Put on the new man. . . . Put on . . . a heart of compassion . . . and above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness.”



Thus in the most practical manner he shows them how to live the Christian life and give Christ in all things the pre-eminence regardless of their station in life, whether it be that of husband or wife, parent or child, master or servant.

The dominant note of the epistle throughout is indeed well expressed and summarized in two lines of Charles Wesley's familiar hymn:

“Thou, O Christ, art all I want,  
More than all in Thee I find.”

## FIRST AND SECOND THESSALONIANS—THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

The First Epistle to the Thessalonians is the earliest of the New Testament books, written in the year 52, or early in the year 53, a few months after Paul was driven from Thessalonica by the bitter persecution which attended the establishment of the church there.

This persecution continued to harass the little band of Christians whom Paul had won from gentile idolatry at Thessalonica, and Paul caused Timothy to return to them to encourage them. Upon Timothy's rejoining Paul at Corinth and reporting to him the steadfastness of their faith under trial, Paul wrote this letter to express his thanksgiving over their "work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope."

The outstanding theme of both the letters to the Thessalonians is the second advent of Jesus Christ. This is the hope which Paul held up to sustain them under persecution.

He commends them for the way they have "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from Heaven." He asks what is his hope, or joy, or crown, or rejoicing, and answers, that it is themselves "in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming." His prayer

was that they might be established "unblamable in holiness before God at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ with his saints."

But the Thessalonians were troubled lest their loved ones who had died would not share in the joy and the glory of Christ's coming. Therefore, Paul wrote to comfort them "concerning them which are asleep," and to assure them that those who were alive at the coming of the Lord should have no advantage over the Christian dead, for at the coming of Christ "the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." This is the keynote, and represents the purpose of the First Epistle to the Thessalonians.

The Second Epistle was written within a few months after the first to correct a misunderstanding they had received either from the first letter or from a spurious letter of some false teacher who wrote "an epistle as from Paul."

The false teachers at Thessalonica were doing just what they are still doing in our midst today. They were interpreting the second coming of Christ in the light of calendars and almanacs instead of in the light of Christ's own words about it. They had a mania for date-setting then as some have with us still. They regarded "the day of the Lord as now present," and their persecution as a part of the great

tribulation which Christ had foretold would attend his advent.

Paul's second letter, therefore, is corrective and foretells the delay of Christ's advent and the series of events that must intervene before his coming.

He severely rebuked the "busybodies" who quit working and became a charge to others because they thought Christ was to return immediately. Paul's advice concerning these was, "If any would not work, neither should he eat."

The second coming of Christ is still "that blessed hope" of the church, and it should never be allowed to minister either to fear, as though we were not "Christ's at his coming," or to the fanaticism of setting of dates. "Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night."

## THE FIRST AND SECOND EPISTLES TO TIMOTHY—ADVICE TO MINISTERS

Timothy was a native of Lystra, where Paul was stoned and left for dead on the occasion of his first visit there, at which time Timothy was probably converted. This explains why Paul calls Timothy his "own son in the faith."

His two letters to Timothy are the advice of a seasoned veteran to a young recruit in the gospel ministry.

The author's purpose in writing the first epistle is well expressed in the words: "That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

In immediate connection with this declaration of purpose he declares the message of truth which it is the business of the church and its ministry to hold aloft as a light upon a pillar. He calls it "the mystery of godliness," and thus summarizes its fundamental points: "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."

The true minister must guard this gospel truth from all false teaching and "old wives' fables," and furthermore adorn it with a godly and prayerful life. He is enjoined to "be an example to them that

believe, in word, in manner of life, in love, in faith, in purity" and to "give heed to reading, to exhortation, to teaching."

The Second Epistle to Timothy is undoubtedly the last letter we have from Paul's pen. It was written from prison shortly before his martyrdom, which he was anticipating when he wrote: "I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." It was to encourage his son Timothy to like steadfastness in keeping the faith that he wrote this second letter.

As in the first epistle the key thought was the church as the pillar and ground of the truth and the minister's responsibility for the proclamation of that truth in its purity, so here also in the second epistle the keynote deals with the minister's responsibility in the handling of that truth: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

The peril of the church at Ephesus, of which Timothy was pastor, was false teaching, which opened the doors to great worldliness and utter godlessness, pictured in the words: "Lovers of self, lovers of money . . . no lovers of good . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof." It is a picture of much that passes before our eyes today as well as in Ephesus nineteen centuries ago.

Against this Paul held up the example of his own teaching and testimony, and urged, "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them." It is the dying veteran's cry to the young recruit, "CARRY ON!"

The equipment which the true minister will find sufficient for such a ministry is the divinely inspired word of God, of which Paul says, "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work."

The function of the ministry is to "preach the word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and teaching."

With such a ministry the church will deserve the title Paul gave her, "the pillar and ground of the truth," or better still, the title Christ gave her, "the light of the world."



## THE EPISTLE TO TITUS—SPIRITUAL COSMETICS

Titus, like Timothy, owed his conversion, under God, to the ministry of the Apostle Paul, who, therefore, addresses him as his "own son after the common faith."

The field of labor to which Paul assigned Titus was a most difficult one in the Island of Crete, among a people described by one of their own prophets whom Paul quotes approvingly as "liars, evil beasts, idle gluttons."

In such a field as this Paul assigned the young minister, Titus, "to set in order the things that were wanting."

Now, what will Paul regard as an adequate equipment for a young minister to bring about orderly living and orderly government in such a difficult parish? Nothing other than the word of God: "Holding to the faithful word which is according to the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers."

The keynote of the letter is in Chapter 2, verse 1: "Speak thou the things which befit the sound doctrine."

This teaching of the scriptures is to be applied by the young minister to the "aged men," "the aged women," "the young women," "the young men"

and even to the slaves, to the end that "they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."

The word which Paul uses for "adorn" is a word of great modern interest. It is the Greek word, "kosmeo," from which we get our English word, "cosmetic." Great impetus has recently been given to the manufacture and application of "cosmetics" for the purpose of "adorning" the physical appearance of folks (with results that are often questionable, to say the least).

Paul's idea was that with equal diligence given to the matter of spiritual "cosmetics" even the Cretans might live down their unsavory reputation and become "purified unto God, a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

This doctrine, which was to play so large a part in this great transformation of the Cretans through this process of spiritual "cosmetics," is concisely stated by Paul in these few words: "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

Paul believed this gospel would not only be the power of God unto salvation for the Cretans, but

also the sufficient dynamic to make them loyal citizens for the state, faithful and loving members of the family and decent members of society.

It always has and always will bear like fruit wherever it is given opportunity. So, Paul's closing appeal to us of the twentieth century as well as to the Cretans of the first century, is, "Let our people also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful."

## THE EPISTLE TO PHILEMON—THE ORIGINAL EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION

The Epistle to Philemon was written from Paul's prison in Rome at the same time and sent by the hand of the same messenger as Colossians, for Philemon was a leading member of the church at Colosse in whose home the church met for its worship.

Onesimus was a slave of Philemon who ran away, probably stealing some of his master's money to assist him in reaching Rome. At Rome he came under the influence of Paul's preaching and was genuinely converted, and confessed his whole past to Paul, and was induced by Paul to return to his master at Colosse and try to make amends for his unfaithfulness.

To make the slave's return easier, and to assure a kindly reception for the returning prodigal, Paul wrote this purely personal letter, which is a perfect gem of courtesy and tact.

The time was when this letter to Philemon was made the strong defense of human slavery. But to so regard it is utterly to miss its spirit and intent. In fact, it asserts a fundamental social principle, based upon the democracy of Jesus Christ, which, when finally accepted by society, outlawed human slavery in the civilized world.

It was a perfectly unique thing, in that day when

human slavery was so universally recognized as right and necessary, for any one of Paul's standing to speak of a slave as Paul does of Onesimus: "For love's sake . . . I beseech thee for my child, whom I have begotten in my bonds, Onesimus, who was aforetime unprofitable to thee, but now is profitable to thee and to me, whom I have sent back to thee in his own person, that is, my very heart."

He even dares to appeal to Philemon to receive back the runaway slave "no longer as a servant, but more than a servant, a brother beloved, in the flesh and in the Lord."

Think of it! A slave to be a "brother beloved" to his master because both are now Christians and servants of one common Master.

Paul was confident that his appeal for the runaway would be heeded, and that Philemon would go even beyond his request in love for Onesimus, for he says: "Having confidence in thine obedience I write unto thee, knowing that thou wilt do *even beyond what I say.*" .

It is this "*beyond,*" this "good measure," this "second mile" that interests us in studying the outlawing of human slavery. Paul did not command that Philemon should set Onesimus free. Neither did Jesus explicitly forbid human slavery. But both Jesus and Paul did proclaim principles of brotherhood and universal love, which, when practiced even imperfectly, make human slavery impossible, because intolerable.

Thus the gospel of equality and brotherly love works quietly but irresistibly as leaven in the meal of society and human slavery has been outlawed by the love that goes "even beyond what is commanded."

War is the next world curse which must be outlawed. But it can only be done as men and women in sufficient numbers in all nations practice the brotherly love taught by Jesus, the love which "goes beyond" and regards even the worst as "a brother beloved."

## THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS— SHADOWS AND SUBSTANCE IN RELIGION

Whether written by Paul or Apollos or some other unknown author, the Epistle to the Hebrews is Pauline throughout in its thought and argument.

It contains a series of contrasts between the best there was in the religion of the Hebrews and the better things taught by and embodied in Jesus Christ. Accordingly the key word is "*better.*"

The author tells them how in former days God had spoken unto them by the prophets, but in these last days by his Son, who is "the effulgence of His glory and the very image of His substance."

He tells them how Christ is "so much *better* than the angels"; how he "was counted worthy of *more glory* than Moses," for "Moses was faithful—as a servant—but Christ as a Son over His own house"; and how he is greater than Joshua as a leader of His people into a place of rest.

He takes up the priesthood of Aaron and Levi and contrasts their imperfections with the "*more excellent ministry*" of Christ, which "brings in a *better hope*," because "Jesus was made a surety of a *better testament*" as "the mediator of a *better covenant* established upon *better promises.*"

He speaks of the architecture of the tabernacle



and temple and shows that it was a mere type and foreshadowing of the "*greater and more perfect tabernacle* not made with hands," in which Christ as the true high priest offered the "*better sacrifices*," "the blood of sprinkling that speaketh *better* things than that of Abel," and which needed not therefore to be repeated annually, but which once for all obtained eternal redemption.

"For Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, like in pattern to the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us; nor yet that He should offer Himself often; . . . but now once . . . to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

Thus through ten chapters the doctrine of the superiority of the person, the priesthood and the propitiation of Christ are set forth, before the author comes, in the last three chapters, to the exhortation to put these things to practice in the life of faith as did the great heroes of faith of Hebrew history, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua and innumerable hosts of others.

This faith which he commends as the ruling principle of their lives is to be centered in "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever."

When a building is to be constructed of concrete a great preliminary network of forms and scaffolding is necessary. Into these forms the concrete is poured and allowed to set. Then the forms and

scaffolding are removed, having served their purpose.

So in the Epistle to the Hebrews we see the purpose of the types and shadows, the services and sacrifices and ritual of the Old Testament. They were merely to indicate and foreshadow the form to be taken by the true and eternal things of Jesus Christ which were to be of "*a better and an enduring substance.*"

## THE EPISTLE OF JAMES—PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

This epistle, which is one of the earliest of the books of the New Testament, was written by James, the brother of our Lord, to Jewish Christians who were scattered abroad by persecution and enduring great trial for their faith.

It is a treatise on practical Christianity second only to the Sermon on the Mount, which it resembles closely in its ethical standards. It might well be called "the Book of Proverbs of the New Testament."

If Paul is the apostle of faith, Peter of hope, and John of love, James is the apostle of works.

James is not so anxious about doctrine as he is about duty. "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." He is more keen about conduct than about creed: "Faith if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. . . . Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works."

James has no word of disparagement for faith, nor even for the great Pauline doctrine of justification "by faith alone without the works of the law." But what he does condemn is the dead and fruitless thing some folks were calling "faith" which did not manifest itself in right living.

True faith will manifest itself in patience under trial: "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

True faith will manifest itself in pure religion, which James defines as "visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction and keeping oneself unspotted from the world."

True faith will permit the church to make no distinction between the rich man with his gold ring and goodly apparel and the poor man in his vile raiment.

True faith will enable a man to control his speech and thus bring into captivity that otherwise most untameable of all creatures, the human tongue.

True faith will give the Christian control "even of the lusts that war in his members," and enable him to resist the devil and put him to flight. It will enable him to maintain a character prayerful, pure, peaceable, and patient even under persecution because of his confidence in a righteous judgment at the coming of the Lord; "Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. . . . Establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. . . . Behold the Judge standeth before the door."

So this apostle of work would sing to us:

"Work, for the night is coming  
When man's work is o'er."

## THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PETER—THE FIERY TRIAL AND THE SUFFICIENT GRACE

The First Epistle of Peter was written, as he tells us in the first verse, “to the elect who are sojourners of the dispersion,” that is, Jewish Christians dispersed by persecution through various lands. They are passing through a “fiery trial” of suffering and needed encouragement. To give them this encouragement was Peter’s purpose in writing this letter.

Accordingly, the key-words will be found to be “suffering,” “grace” and “hope”—hope sustained by grace in spite of suffering. The essence of the entire letter might well be condensed into the word of the Lord which came to Paul regarding the thorn in his flesh, namely, “My grace is sufficient for thee.”

He first refers to the grace which is sufficient to save: “Unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. *Grace* unto you and peace be multiplied.”

From this he passes to his main object of commending the grace which is sufficient for suffering: “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober and hope to the end for the *grace* that is to be brought unto you.” His plan is always to throw the light of Christ’s sufferings upon their own path of suffering: “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.”

But he goes beyond the sphere of passive suffering into that of active service, and promises grace sufficient for service in the privacy of the home and in the public life of the church. So husbands and wives are urged to dwell together according to knowledge, "as being heirs together of the *grace* of life." Ministers, too, are urged to service in the strength of the same grace, "as good stewards of the manifold *grace* of God."

Finally Peter exalts this grace because it is sufficient to make for stability. Peter himself knew the peril of denying Christ in that fiery trial, for at the first he had been very unstable. But that was thirty years before. Meantime grace had done its work and given him stability. Therefore, he prays for them that "the God of all *grace* after that they have suffered awhile, make them perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle them."

His final word is, "This is the true *grace* of God wherein ye stand." So he commends to them in "the trial of their faith" the grace which for thirty years he had found sufficient not only to save and suffer and serve, but also to stand—to "stick."

Nothing less than this grace of God, this lifting, strengthening, keeping power and love of God is sufficient to enable us to stand today, for we have the same "adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walking about us, seeking whom he may devour."

## THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PETER AND THE EPISTLE OF JUDE—WARNING AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS

Both of these letters were written about the same time and for the same purpose of warning their readers against false teachers.

Peter's second epistle differs from his first in that the purpose of the first letter is to encourage Christians to remain steadfast against persecution and trial of their faith assailing them from outside the fold, while the second letter warns against the perils of foes within the fold.

Quite naturally, since he is dealing with false teaching as opposed to what they had been led to know as the truth, his key-words are "knowledge" and "remembrance."

He speaks with the authority of an eyewitness of the deity and glory of Christ and not as a "follower of cunningly devised fables." And yet he reminds them that in the holy scriptures they have "a more sure word of prophecy" because these scriptures "came not by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

The Christian who falls a prey to false teachers is the one who has not known or has not held in remembrance the truth taught in the scriptures.

The marks of a false teacher which he mentions



are covetousness and licentiousness perpetrated in the name of religion and the making mockery of the second coming of Christ.

His solemn warning is the fate of the fallen angels, of the world in Noah's day and of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha. To these he adds the warning of the fate of Balaam as an outstanding false teacher of their own history.

Peter's final appeal is made in two great words which sum up the message of the entire letter, namely, "Beware" and "Grow." "Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

The keynote of Jude's brief letter is "Contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

Those with whom his readers must contend are the same false teachers against whom Peter had warned them, and Jude's description of them is quite similar and his warnings almost identical.

These false teachers are "ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ."

Jude cites from their own history the fate of their ancestors in the wilderness, the fallen angels and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha, together with Cain, Balaam and Korah, much as Peter does in his letter. He exhorts them to keep themselves in the love of

God, and for this keeping commends them “to Him that is able to keep them from falling and to present them faultless before the presence of His glory.”

Both of these letters are like an echo of the words of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, “Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”

## THE THREE EPISTLES OF ST. JOHN—THE LAST WORD TO THE CHURCH

In the three epistles of St. John we have the last word of holy scripture addressed to the church, for these letters were written even after the Revelation which stands last in our Bibles.

By the year 90 A. D., when these letters were being written, the teaching of gnosticism was rampant in the church, with its denial of the true humanity of Jesus as well as of his deity, and its effort to make a division between a "Jesus" element and a "Christ" element in the personality of the Saviour.

John wrote his first epistle to rebuke and correct this false teaching. In it he writes of the profoundest things in simplest monosyllables, as "God," "truth," "death," "life," "love," "light," "God is love," "God is light."

He writes with the positiveness of one who has personally heard, seen and handled the Son of God, and therefore, can say "We know" and "We do know that we know." Forty times in the first letter occurs this word "know" or kindred terms, making this letter the Christian's best answer to the vagaries of agnosticism.

The theme of the letter is the Christian's fellowship with God through Christ.

The nature of this fellowship is described as walk-

ing in light, for, "God is light." Hatred and sin in the life are proof of one's walking in darkness away from the light of God.

The fruit of this fellowship is love, for, "God is love." One's love for God is best proven by love for his brother, and this not love in word only but in deed and in truth.

The enemy of this fellowship is the spirit of anti-Christ "that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh."

The foundation of this fellowship is true faith in Christ as the Son of God, and this faith is the assurance of eternal life. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."

Accordingly, the Christian's fellowship is a fellowship with God in Light, in Love, in Truth, in Life, and all this through faith in Christ the Son of God.

The Second and Third Epistles are personal letters. The key-word of both is "truth," which is found twelve times in these two brief letters.

The Second Epistle urges Christian fellowship in brotherly love: "That we love one another. And this is love, that we walk after His commandments." But it also urges just as strongly against any fellowship with the "deceivers who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh."

The Third Epistle was written to one Gaius to commend him for his gracious hospitality towards

the visiting brethren who were traveling from place to place in their Christian ministry. It also condemns just as strongly the opposite spirit of hostility of one Diotrephes, who was dominating the church in his own selfish interest.

In all three of his epistles as well as in his gospel, this "disciple whom Jesus loved," proves himself the apostle of love, for love is his "hobby." But he proves as clearly that he merits the nickname, "son of thunder," given him by his Master, as the lightning of his wrath and the thunder of his denunciation flash and crash against the false teachers of his day who did violence to the truth in precept and in practice.

## THE REVELATION—THINGS YET TO COME

The "Revelation" or "Apocalypse" is Christ's own "unveiling," as the word means, of "things which must shortly come to pass." As such it is the New Testament's single book of prophecy.

The key to the book is found in chapter one, verse nineteen: "Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which are and the things which shall come to pass hereafter."

So John wrote in chapter one the things he saw and heard from Christ Himself in his vision on the Isle of Patmos.

In chapters two and three he outlined "the things which are," as those things, then present, were pointed out in Christ's messages to the seven churches of Asia.

In chapters four to twenty-two we have prophecies of "the things which shall come to pass hereafter."

One reading this book must be struck with the recurrence of the number "seven"—seven churches, seven candlesticks, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven vials, seven plagues, etc.

The last nineteen chapters of the book which describe "the things which shall come to pass hereafter," that is, in connection with and following the second coming of Christ, will be understood best if

studied in connection with Matthew's twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters and Daniel's prophecy of the same events as he pictures this period in his "seventieth week." For both Daniel's prophecy and John's divide the period of these events into two equal periods of three and a half years, variously called "forty and two months" or "a thousand two hundred and three score days," or "a time and times and half a time."

Chapters six to eleven describe the first half of this period, a period of false government, wars, famine, death and persecution that will devastate heaven, earth and sea. The symbols used are the seven seals and seven trumpets.

Chapters twelve to eighteen describe the terrible period of tribulation which is to characterize the last half of this period which is to usher in the millennium. This period is to be marked by the casting of Satan out of heaven and his fierce and final struggle before his period of bondage. Seven angels pour out of seven vials the seven plagues of divine wrath against sin.

Then follows in chapters nineteen and twenty the description of the millennium or thousand-year period of Satan's bondage which is to attend the coming of Christ in glory, and after this period the final destruction of Satan and all evil at the judgment of the great white throne.

The sequel to all these things is "a new heaven and a new earth," the "new Jerusalem" of which "the



Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple” and “the Lamb is the light thereof,” and a new Paradise with its “river of the water of life” and “tree of life” to take the place of the original Paradise lost by man’s sin in Eden.

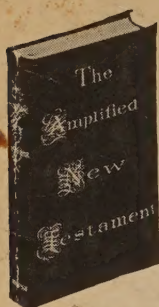
No wonder then, that when the Son of God, who is thus to “make all things new” as He brings with Him this new order, says, “Behold I come quickly,” the Spirit and the church and all that hear reply, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

The Old Testament ends with the word “curse,” but the New Testament ends with the promise of and prayer for Christ’s coming, and He removes the curse and leaves in its place a blessing, so that the New Testament may end with a benediction: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”





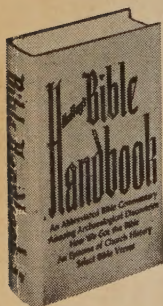
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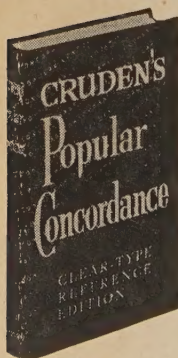
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